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SERMONS

PREACHED TO

PAROCHIAL CONGREGATIONS,

BY THE LATE REVEREND

RICHARD SOUTHGATE, B.A.

MANY YEARS CURATE OF ST. GILES'S IN THE FIELDS.

SOME TIME RECTOR OF WARSON, NOTTINGHAMSHIRE.

WITH

A BIOGRAPHICAL PREFACE,

BY

GEORGE GASKIN, D.D.

RECTOR OF ST. BENE'T GRACECHURCH, LONDON;

AND OF STOKE-NEWINGTON, MIDDLESEX.

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BY THE REV. R. M. O. N. S.

RICHARD J. O. N. S.

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A BOOK

OF THE GAZETTE

OF THE LONDON GAZETTE

OF THE LONDON GAZETTE

IN THE YEAR

1800

VOL. I

LONDON

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PREFACE.

AN earnest desire, on the part of the Editor, to promote that good, which was the great object of the pious Author and Preacher of the following Sermons, is the only motive for making them publick.

It might have been well, had the original manuscripts, from which they are printed, received their last corrections and embellishment from his own pen. The judicious and candid reader, will, therefore, it is hoped, make proper allowance for such imperfections, as may be expected in a posthumous work, which has not received the advantage of being prepared for the press by the Author himself. There may likewise be some typographical errors, which even great care has

not been able to prevent. The selection has been made, and titles given to the Sermons, with all the judgment, of which the Editor is master; and, he is confident, that if the lessons and opportunities for improvement in the christian life, furnished by an attentive perusal, with a view to this publication, of the excellent, evangelical, and masterly Discourses of his much-valued deceased Friend; be not in some degree productive of that good in him, at which the pious Author ever aimed, throughout the whole of his ministry, it will appear to his dismay, at the great day of account.

They are the productions of a man, whose mind was well furnished and highly cultivated; whose learning was extensive and accurate, particularly in classics, history, and theology; whose principles were formed strictly upon the orthodox views of the Church of England, whether we contemplate her primitive episcopal constitution, or her creed;

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creed; whose high aim was to promote the glory of God, the knowledge of Christ crucified for the salvation of penitent sinners; and the spiritual edification of Christians; whose ministry was exercised with gravity, zeal, and perseverance; whose politics were such as the Bible inculcates, and the primitive Christians gloried in; whose temper was mild and amiable; and the tenor of whose life, adorned the doctrine of "God our Saviour."

"He, being dead, yet speaketh," warning and admonishing the profligate, the careless, and the formal, to turn from the error of their ways; administering the consolations of the Gospel to the humble and dejected penitent; and encouraging the true and consistent Christian, to persevere stedfastly in "the faith once delivered to the saints;" and, devoutly using the means of grace instituted in THE CHURCH, to persevere in well-doing, looking for that high and glorious recompence of reward, which, for Christ's sake, will be the portion of the righteous.

“Memoirs” of his life have already been drawn out, and * submitted to the eye of the public. The reader’s curiosity, may, however, be gratified by the introduction, here, of the following particulars, for several of which the Editor is indebted to those Memoirs.

The Reverend RICHARD SOUTHGATE was the eldest son of Mr. William Southgate, a considerable farmer at Alwalton, in Huntingdonshire, by Hannah his wife, the daughter of Mr. Robert Wright, of Castor, in Northamptonshire. He was born at Alwalton on the 16th of March, 1729, and received the rudiments of his education in a private school at Uppingham; whence he was removed to Fotheringay, under the care of the Rev. Mr. Morgan; and soon afterwards he was

* They are prefixed to “Museum Southgatum,” or a Catalogue of Mr. SOUTHGATE’s valuable collection of books, coins, medals, and natural history. Printed for Leigh and Sotheby, York-street, Covent-garden, 1795. Price 5s. in boards.

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sent to the college school at Peterborough, then superintended by the Rev. Mr. Thomas Marshall, under whom he acquired a considerable knowledge of the Greek and Roman classics, and for whom, till Mr. Marshall's death, he continued to entertain considerable affection and respect.

His natural abilities, literary acquirements, and good conduct, at this early period, gained him the estimation of many respectable persons, and particularly of Dr. John Thomas, then Bishop of Lincoln, his father's particular friend. Under the countenance of this prelate, and with an exhibition from Peterborough, he removed to Cambridge, and was admitted of St. John's College in the year 1745, under the tuition of the Rev. Mr. (afterwards Dr.) Rutherford, to whom he was well recommended by his friend, and late master, Mr. Marshall. In college, he lived a retired, studious, and exemplary life,

but seems not to have pursued, at least with any peculiar attachment, the favourite mathematical studies of that university. His time, nevertheless, was fully, and well, occupied. In classical literature, philology in general, logic, ethics, history, physics, and the talent of composition, he made a rapid and considerable proficiency, all along considering, and then making, these studies subservient to the acquisition of that theological knowledge, which is necessary to form the sound divine, and well-furnished clergyman.

He took the degree of B. A. in Easter Term, 1749, and then, not having obtained a fellowship, found himself, much to his regret, under the necessity of discontinuing his academical residence. That spirit of resignation, which enabled him, through life, properly to submit to the dispensations of Providence, supported him under this severe disappointment; and he retired to pursue his studies

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studies at Alwalton, where he was accommodated with books from the library of the then worthy rector of that parish, Dr. Neve.

On the 24th of September, 1752, at Bugden, he was ordained deacon, and on the 22d of September, 1754, priest, by Bishop Thomas; who, on the 8th of November, in the same year, collated him to the rectory of Woolley in Hunts, which had fallen to the Bishop by lapse, and which he held five years, (all along expending the income of it in repairing and improving the parsonage premises,) and then freely and voluntarily resigned to the Bishop. The patron, having arrived at competent age, and taken priest's orders, succeeded him in the living.

With this circumstance the Bishop was well pleased, and hence, as well as on other accounts, Mr. SOUTHCOTE had good reason to expect preferment from his Lordship, but he did

did not receive it, nor was he ever heard to murmur at his disappointment.

Before he settled in London, he successively served several curacies, and frequently officiated at other places. Upton and Leighton-Bromswold, in Hunts; Weston and Wykeham, in Lincolnshire; Coveney and Maney, in the Isle of Ely; Godmanchester, in Hunts; Lowth, Rathby, Tathwell, and Cawkwell, in Lincolnshire; and Doddington and Newnham, in Kent, either had him as their stated curate, or their frequent preacher; and several of the sermons in the following collection were his early compositions for the pulpit, and preached at those places.

Early in the year 1763, on the recommendation of his friend Bishop Thomas, to Dr. Nichols, Rector of St. James's, Westminster, he became an assistant-curate of that parish. Dr. Parker succeeding Dr. Nichols, in that rectory, at the latter end of the same year,

year, he continued under him in this engagement till Christmas 1765, when he became curate of St. Giles's in the Fields, by appointment of the rector Dr. Gally, on the recommendation of his friend Dr. Parker, who ever continued much to value him.

Dr. Gally, who well knew how to appreciate merit, soon contracted a great affection for Mr. SOUTHGATE, as well on account of his literature, as for his strict and exemplary life, and zealous attention to the pastoral duties.

In this very laborious curacy he continued till the time of his death, exhibiting an illustrious portraiture of a learned, pious, and most indefatigable conscientious parish priest. For very many years, he had no stated assistant in the discharge of his parochial duties, and he often performed, on the same day, the several offices of the church belonging to the function of a parish minister, all which

too he ever performed with the utmost solemnity and devotion.

As a preacher, his voice and manner were not perhaps the most attracting; but, that he was found in the faith, and eminently skilful in rightly dividing, and forcibly applying, the word of truth, these volumes will abundantly testify.

If, in any parts of the pastoral office, more than in others, he was particularly laborious, it was in visiting, catechizing, and exhorting the poor. In the parish of St. Giles, the baptisms at the font are daily, and very numerous; on which occasions, he constantly either catechized, or lectured, the sponsors, awfully impressing upon them the high importance of an attention, not only to the charge there undertaken, but to the various obligations and privileges of the christian life; and the good seed so judiciously and seasonably sown, at those times, could

not

not but be eminently fruitful. In visiting the sick, and particularly the sick poor, he was almost *every day* engaged, as his intimate friends well know, and his journal testifies; praying with, and exhorting, the afflicted to submit patiently to the chastising hand of God, counselling the profane, and inconsiderate, to reflect upon, and amend their ways, and admonishing all to flee from the wrath to come, and accept the salvation tendered in the gospel, on the terms it prescribes. When he became able, his prayers, and exhortations, were frequently accompanied with his alms, administering at once to the spiritual and the bodily wants of his poor parishioners. No clergyman, probably, in his day, was more, and very few certainly were so much, engaged in those interesting and highly useful parts of the pastoral office, as Mr. SOUTHGATE. It was as meat and drink to him to do the will of his heavenly father; and in the most laborious work of the vineyard

vineyard of his great master, he was constantly and chearfully occupied.

His learning, talents, and virtues penetrated through the obscurity, which his own diffidence and modesty had thrown over him, and he successively became acquainted not only with men of the first character for science and literature, but also with several persons of high rank and fortune, amongst whom was the Lord Chancellor Bathurst. From this nobleman, who well knew and acknowledged, the merits of Mr. SOUTHGATE, he had good grounds to expect ecclesiastical preferment, which he never received.

On the 8th of May 1783, he was instituted, by Thomas, Lord Bishop of Lincoln, to the small rectory of Little Steeping, in Lincolnshire, on the presentation of the duke of Ancaſter, to whoſe duchefs, Mr. SOUTHGATE had been long known; and he was

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inducted into this rectory on the 20th day of the following month. In the same year, by the death of a relation, an estate in White-chapel, consisting of two messuages, devolved to him, as heir at law. And on the third day of November, 1784, he was appointed, on the death of Dr. Gifford, assistant librarian at the British Museum, an office for which he was eminently qualified; and thither he went to reside, in the following month of December. His income now enabled him more freely to continue indulging his inclination to purchase books, coins, and fossils; which indeed he had begun to do at an early period of life, notwithstanding the then straightness of his finances, and the disposition he ever entertained, and exercised, of giving alms to the needy.

At a period of life, when he thought of nothing less than other preferment, he was freely presented, by John Gally Knight, esq; son of his former rector and friend Dr. Gally,

to the valuable rectory of Warfop, in Nottinghamshire, then vacant by the death of bishop Halifax, to which he was instituted, by William, Lord Archbishop of York, on the 12th of May, and inducted on the 6th of July, 1790, thereby vacating the rectory of Little Steeping. Such an honourable exercise of ecclesiastical patronage, on the part of Mr. Knight, will ever reflect upon him a high degree of credit.

Mr. SOUTHGATE's attachment to the parochial duties of St. Giles's, did not suffer him to relinquish his curacy: he therefore contented himself with a partial residence at Warfop, whither he went every summer till his death; the increase of his income furnishing him with ample means to extend the amount of his alms, and to gratify his inclination to collect books and coins.

In the same year, he was chosen a member of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge,

ledge; and in the year following, he was elected a fellow of the Society of Antiquarians; and was afterwards made a member of the Linnæan Society.

For a long time, he had been often subject to a cough and asthmatic complaint, which became more and more troublesome to him, as he advanced in years and corpulency, till, in the very hard frost at the end of the year 1794, he became seriously ill, and on the 12th of the January following, was obliged to confine himself to his room. The weather gradually getting more severe, his complaints encreased, and on sunday the 25th day of this month, after having borne his bodily afflictions with christian patience and resignation, he departed this life, at the British Museum, to enter into the joys of a better, through the merits of Jesus Christ, in the ministry of whose church he had long and faithfully served.

His remains were deposited in the vault under St. Giles's church; and his funeral sermon was preached by the worthy rector, Dr. Buckner, now Lord Bishop of Chichester, who, well knowing the virtues of Mr. SOUTHGATE's character, entertained for him the most sincere and cordial esteem.

He left behind him a choice and very valuable collection of books, coins, medals, shells, and other natural curiosities, which were afterwards sold by auction, by Leigh and Sotheby, in York-street, Covent Garden, the sale continuing one and twenty days. The books consisted of the best editions, fine copies, mostly in excellent condition, and many in superb binding. The coins and medals, (in the knowledge of which he was singularly eminent and accurate, so as to be equalled by very few persons, if by any,) independent of the Greek and Roman, which though fine, were not numerous, principally consisted of Anglo-Saxon, English, and
Anglo-

Anglo-Gallic coins; English town pieces and tradesmen's tokens; English and foreign medals; papal medals; dollars; early small silver coins of Europe; Asiatic and Armenian coins. And, the fossils and shells, though not numerous, had amongst them many specimens of high beauty and rarity.

The Inscription on a monumental Tablet, in
St. Giles's Church.

In
memory of
the Rev. RICHARD SOUTHGATE, A. B.
rector of Warlop,
in the county of Nottingham;
one of the sub-librarians
of the British Museum:
and, during 30 years, curate of this parish;
who died Jan. 25, 1795,
in the 66th year of his age.
In every station of his life
he executed its respective duties
with judgment, diligence, and fidelity.
Deep were his researches, and his learning various.
Languages and Science acknowledged him a Scholar,
Theology, a Divine.
The purity of his faith, the rectitude of his conduct,
and his unwearied labours in the pastoral office,
testified his piety
towards GOD:
his mildness, humility, and candour,
with his exemplary attention to the wants,
temporal as well as spiritual,
of his fellow-creatures,
proved his benevolence
towards MAN.

Reader!

*if thou canst—excel him;
it will be well,
if thou canst equal him!*

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—	23,	—	17,	<i>for increase read incense.</i>
—	57,	—	11,	<i>for nor read not.</i>
—	90,	—	5,	<i>for given read forgiven.</i>
—	140,	—	1,	<i>for privileges read privilege:</i>
—	—	—	17,	<i>for own read home.</i>
—	150,	—	18,	<i>for conscience read conscioufness.</i>
—	163,	—	2,	<i>after men insert that can render a reason.</i>
—	170,	—	8,	<i>for sit read set.</i>
—	199,	—	5,	<i>for with read wist.</i>
—	229,	—	4,	<i>the omitted.</i>
—	234,	—	25,	<i>for guard read guide.</i>
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—	354,	—	18,	<i>for these read there.</i>
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SERMON I.

THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY.

2 Cor. ii. 15, and part of 16.

*For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ,
in them that are saved, and in them that perish.
To the one, we are the savour of death unto
death; and to the other, the savour of life unto
life.*

AS the ministerial office was instituted, in
behalf of the whole church of Christ,
so whenever we make it the subject of our
discourses, this very end should always be
kept in view. Herein, we follow the example
of those, that have gone before us, who are
the best patterns of imitation; and, should we
seem herein to magnify our office, it is for
your edification and salvation. Should we
seem to make it more important, this force

are willing to allow, it is that we may the more effectually prevail with you to co-operate with us in those salutary effects, it was intended to promote. We have a right, therefore, to expect not only your patient, but your favourable hearing, especially since we cannot enforce the ends of our own function, but we engage ourselves, by very powerful motives, to employ it in a manner the most conducive to your real good.

It is obvious to observe, that the ministers of Christ derive all their use, from the excellence of the Gospel they administer. As their ability is communicated by Christ, so are the materials with which they work, without whose salutary virtue, no skill, or diligence, of their own, would make them successful. As the efficacy of the healing drugs crowns the labours of the physician, so the divine treasures, displayed in the covenant of grace, enable the steward of Christ to be the happy instrument of the noblest blessings.

To dispense these treasures aright, is to perform a service acceptable to God. "We are unto God," says the Apostle, "a sweet savour of Christ." We diffuse the odour of his

his grace; we endeavour to extend its benign virtue. As there is no service more honourable than this, so there is none more privileged. We are called fellow-workers with God, the stewards of his mysteries, the helpers of your joy. We cannot answer these important titles, without this protection, and peculiar presence. But the very work, we are engaged in, invites, and calls down a blessing; had we no particular promise of this, we are assured of it, from the very aspect of man's redemption. The primary end of our ministry is to reconcile man to God, and, therefore, to attempt this desirable end, must be agreeable to the Father of mercy. There is no doubt of this, with respect to those, who obey the gospel call, and are saved; and though others reject it, and perish, still to persevere in the invitation, to intreat, to warn, to urge the necessary business, is expected, and will be rewarded. If we blow the trumpet, though they die in their iniquity, we deliver our souls.

This ministry, with which we are entrusted, is employed about the heart of man, to carry the candle of the Lord into its deepest recesses, to bring to the light of his Gospel

every thing there, that rests in contented darkness. It displays the guilt and the misery of sin, and unfolds the terrors of divine judgment; but it opens the door of hope to the penitent, and comforts those that mourn for their iniquity, by holding forth the divine mercy. It not only reveals the way of holiness, but it enforces and commands all the finer duties of religion. It rouses the languid, excites the slothful, and encourages the willing to walk in them. It seeks to direct the heart aright, by the alluring persuasions of hope and love.

However, the same corruption of our nature, which made the Gospel of Christ at first necessary, is often too strong for the most urgent means of grace it administers. It operates upon men, as reasonable agents; it reasons with them, and brings forth its strong arguments, but it destroys not the freedom of the human will, and takes not away their liberty to reject it; accordingly, we see vast numbers, who hold out against all its invitations: it charms, by its own silent and native eloquence, but then the noise and cares of the world often drown all attention to its charms. Even when its messengers go forth

to call the guests, this is the general answer, "I pray you have me excused;" I am too idle, or too busy, to be entreated. Some refuse the religion of Christ, through inconsiderate rashness: they are not aware of the value of the treasures they forego: others, through stupidity; the carnal mind debases them; they are in love with none but brutal pleasures; mere swine in their appetites; they see the Gospel pearl, and turn away. Many are also possessed with a vain opinion of themselves; pride turns the conceited ear, and says, reserve your lessons for others; my creed is contained in a narrow compass: I am my own instructor, and know my duty.

Let us not then blame the Gospel, or its ministers, if their success be small: the seed requires its proper soil, otherwise in vain does the husbandman plant, and water; in vain does the sun shed forth its genial beams; the produce will be nothing, or only briars and thorns. Just so with the heart of man: with the unwilling and obdurate heart, love miscarries, fear has no terror, hope no engaging prize; the Gospel itself, in which all these are centered, though preached with the tongue of angels, no efficacy; it warns them, and

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they

they will not be warned; the medicine it offers is salutary, but they are in love with their disease. However, the matter ends not here: this very Gospel, so benign and healing in its tendency, is thus turned into the favour of death. Nor is this peculiar to the Gospel: every good thing, when perverted and abused, becomes the source of woe.—“Sin,” says the Apostle, taking occasion by the commandment, “deceived me, and by it, slew me: the commandment ordained to life, to the wilfully deceived, became death.” If this be true, with respect to the law, the consequence is much more to be dreaded, in the rejection of the Gospel: we may say of this what our Saviour says of himself,—“whosoever shall fall on this stone, shall be broken, but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.” When men hear the wrath of God, against sin, represented in such an awakening form, through the death of Christ, that nothing, but the execution thereof, can make it more alarming, and yet will persist in sin, and provoke that wrath, either the strongest convictions must be overcome, or the conscience affected by the severest wounds. Moreover, when they are not to be won by the glad tidings

tidings of salvation; when the riches of God's love are displayed, and men receive it not; what havoc must temptation make in their base affections! Every display of the divine word, held forth by its dispensers, must make resolved sinners more resolved, and hardened: hence, in order to avoid the light, they plunge deeper into darkness; in the mean time, while it thus heightens their ingratitude, it leaves them no cloak for their sin; their greater guilt demands their greater punishment. Thus does the manifestation of the Gospel grind those to powder, whom it first condemns; it takes from them every source of hope; it gives death the greater sting, and punishment its severer anguish.

But further, we are unto others "the savour of life unto life:" some, indeed, there are, who attend to the means of instruction, and receive the word, with the regard due to a divine message; they consider it not so much belonging to those who deliver it, as to him whose messengers they are; they know it is at their own peril, if they refuse him that speaketh; and they give that voice admittance, which shaketh the heaven, and the earth, and penetrates even into hell. This

is, therefore, part of their character, that they tremble at his word. Well they may! the wonder is, that any should hear it, and not tremble. Every display of divine affections! Every display of the word, held forth by its dispensers, must make

But this is not all: the ministration of the Gospel, when duly improved, restores man to the true dignity of his nature; it shews him the danger of sin, the hazard of delay, the folly of rejecting mercy, and inviting judgment; it brings all who receive it to a true sense of their condition, so that they trust not to the infirm supports, which their self-confidence may administer, but rest in the sure foundation of hope, laid in the scriptures; these, when displayed in their full energy, revive the penitent with the hope of pardon, so that when every other refuge fails, a refuge in the divine mercy, through Christ, brings repose to the troubled breast. Sweet word of consolation, without thy succour what desponding terrors would agitate the guilty conscience! Humble christians have likewise reason to bless the word, since it assists them in the race, they are engaged to run. The many obstructions to this race, can only be surmounted, by such motives as are peculiar to the Gospel; but *this*, when their own lan-

guor would make them despond, when their own hearts would betray them, urges them on to conquest, and to glory; through this ministry, they obtain the privilege of a single eye; they know both how to approve and practise things that are excellent, so that they are not deceived by specious forms of virtue, but embrace the reality of it, and endeavour to perfect holiness in the fear of God. It is this, which enlightens their conscience, and gives every duty its proper place, both in their heart, and their practice. Thus supported and directed, they go on, through this vale of misery, to the land of promise. Pilgrims here, they hasten forward. Relieved, content, and cheerful, they beguile the troubles of life, and fix their affections on those heavenly prospects, to which God invites them. All this comfort they receive; these privileges they enjoy, from hearing and believing the word. It first exalts them to newness of life, then fills them with the assured expectation of life eternal. Here, then, is the true efficacy of religion: from these, the word preached, returns not empty, but brings forth fruit, in some an hundred fold, in some sixty, in some thirty.

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From hence, then, my brethren, arises the necessity of an enquiry. In the first place, do you highly esteem this word of God? Do you diligently attend it? Do you mark it? Do you apply it? Are you desirous it should search your heart? Has it its proper influence upon you? Do you bring your principles to its decisions, and your conduct to its rules? So that when it has taken deep root within you, you may say with the Psalmist, "How sweet are thy words unto my throat, yea, sweeter than honey unto my mouth." Some effect it will have: it will either fill you with peace and joy in believing, or bitterness in the latter end. It saves, or it destroys. To hear it with indifference, then, is extreme folly; to convert its sweet odour into poison, is extreme wretchedness. To have immortal souls, and yet to extract eternal death from the food of immortality, is a degree of madness, which wants a name.

In order to avoid such shocking reflections, there are many, who make lies their confidence, and take shelter in unbelief. If the word is against them, they will be against the word. This was the case with the Jews of old. The word of God abode not in them:

they

they were indisposed to receive it: pride and carnality had enslaved them to their own party: therefore they disbelieved. They were proof against the most awakening warnings of our Lord, nay, against the testimony of their own senses. They imputed what they heard, and what they saw, to the power of Beelzebub; "he hath a devil and is mad, why hear ye him?" From the same source, is derived the incredulity of our modern libertines: they affect to despise, what they will not obey.

Others there are, who, though not bold enough to run these lengths, yet having a secret dislike to the word, malign and vilify those that preach it. Such as these are so far consistent with themselves. Our very order is a standing reproach to their sins. And as they are resolved not to profit by our admonitions, they forebode evil, from our ministry, to their own souls, and esteem us the troublers of their repose; for, we disturb the confidence of their groundless hopes.

In consequence of this, there are many, who refuse attendance upon the word, a species of irreligion pregnant with the most fatal issue.

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Every institution of God is of the utmost importance to man: every institution of God neglected aggravates, not excuses, sin. What then will it profit a man, to shun the monitors of his danger? he cannot make his condition any other than what it really is. Or, to lull his conscience into a short repose? it will hereafter speak as loud as the trump of God that wakes him from the grave. Alas! what avails the poor condemned criminal, that he will not hear his sentence passed, nor attend to the warnings of his doom? he can neither stop, nor delay its execution. Others there are, who hear not the voice of the messengers of Christ, because they are strangers to the peculiar duties of the Gospel, well inculcate. Content with the principles they receive from their education, and the world, from them they learn their habits, both of thinking and acting. Hence they confine themselves to the general obligations of society, without enlarging their minds with the spiritual relations of the church of Christ. Others there are, who not content with their regular pastors, heap to themselves teachers, as they did even in the times of the apostles, whose itching ears still continue to demand novelty, and self-gratification: whilst a great number, to
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this infirmity of the ear, add its disease also. I mean those, who, intent upon the doctrines only, would banish the virtues of christianity, and convert the salutary gospel of Christ, into a system of disputation. All these, instead of esteeming us very highly in love for our works' sake, are easily induced to join the general cry, and become enemies to our function.

However, we should not wonder at this, as if some strange thing had happened. It is no more than we ought to expect, and should be prepared to receive. The Jews denied Christ: wicked men do the same, at this very day. And if they call the master of the house Beelzebub, much more them of his household. If they reject his gospel, well they may the infirm dispensers of it. This then arises from the very nature of the office we administer. It is impossible to make life and death consistent, the spiritual and carnal mind to produce the same effects.

Nor indeed should we be angry, at the perverseness and opposition of men, with respect to ourselves. They have reason for this: through it their condemnation is made more

weighty and severe. But, far be it from us to glory over those that perish, or accuse them in the evil day—God forbid! It is still our duty to bear with them in love, to caution, to persuade, to persist in the invitation, and if possible, to conquer enmity by kindness. Let every other sentiment then in us be silenced, with respect to them, but to pity, to love, and forgive. And we will only say of each impenitent sinner, “Oh that thou hadst known, even thou in this thy day the things which belong to thy peace, but now they are hid from thine eyes!”

But, whilst life remains, we must not despair of any. Whilst the divine mercy is offered, we must co-operate with it, and labour that none perish, through our fault. For who knows but some may be wrought upon, by the labour of love, from enemies to become friends; and what is still more, the friends of God, and his anointed. To our labours must be added prayers and intercessions, that he who reconciles the world unto himself, may turn the hearts of the disobedient to embrace wisdom. We cannot be too earnest in this cause, nor watchful to a better end. To our public instructions, we must

must add private admonitions, and use all lawful means of knowing not only the outward conduct and public manners, but the undisguised sentiments of those committed to our care, that so we may speak in season, and work upon the conscience.

My brethren, it is your cause that is deeply concerned; and if you are sincere in this cause, you will suffer the word of exhortation; you will compare it with the scriptures, and esteem it not as coming from man, but the living God. And since we have one common interest, you will think it your duty to co-operate with us, and receive us with all cordiality, and affection. The human mind is so formed, that when the message of the gospel is entertained, with due regard, the messengers will be welcomed also. "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of them, that preach the gospel, that bring glad tidings of good things." The credit of the ministry is always in proportion to the influence of religion. And there never was an instance of a truly pious and christian spirit, that did not love and honour those for their works sake, who bear this relation to Christ, as being his ministers and stewards.

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The officiating clergy of this nation have an especial claim to the regards of good men, on account of the difficulties of their ministry, arising from the number, the different habits, the different sentiments, the various prejudices and partialities of those committed to their care. Besides, amidst the general perverseness of the times, we too are necessarily exposed to no small share of the privileged licence. Nor can any qualifications, on our part, prevent this. On the contrary, they often provoke the sneers of the envious; they stir up the malice of the wicked, to display more abundant wickedness. This necessarily arises from those avowed sentiments, with respect to all religion, and those notorious neglects of religious duty, which too much form the general character of these kingdoms.

Another mark of your sincerity is a liberal spirit towards your teachers. A retribution for spiritual things is a debt of justice, a debt of the highest obligation, which though it should not be enforced by human laws, arises from a higher source, the very religion you profess. But I leave this topic, lest it should be interpreted by the ignorant and ill-disposed, as an argument of selfishness, of which not
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only the reality, but the very appearance should be avoided, though indeed I do not believe that it will be so interpreted by you. However, "it is a small thing for us to be judged of you, or of man's judgment." The judge standeth before the door: that judge, who commands us to press forward, through evil report and good report, through flattery, through suspicions, through caresses, through oppositions, and every obstruction to his kingdom.

Give, then, my brethren, in this, and every other part of christian duty, a full evidence of your sincerity, and growth, in true religion. If you imagine religion consistent with a base and selfish heart, go to the house of mammon, and worship there. If you are content with the *form* of godliness, or in adopting religious notions, profess not that faith, which, in its genuine efficacy, calls forth the *spirit* and the *power*. If any of you should be such entire strangers to the Bible, as to think that faith alone will save you, indeed you cannot reasonably expect acceptance at the last from that God, who will reward every man according to his works. Or if you should so tare asunder the word of God, as to

separate the duties from the privileges, and confine the precious name of the gospel to the latter only, here is a source of error, which will produce innumerable and aggravated evils. "Be ye then doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves." Put away from you all pride, and partiality, and strifes, and divisions, and the discontented ear, and the revolting heart, and "receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is *then, and then only*, able to save your souls." May, then, we that preach, and you that hear, unite and encrease in the work of love! that so, when we give our accounts to the Judge of all, we may partake of each other's joy, and join together in the songs of praise, which celebrate redeeming and everlasting love.

To God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, be all majesty and glory ascribed, now, and for evermore.

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SERMON II.

under the conduct of their king, they were restoring the holy city, they could not but view the sins of their fathers, and read a

lesson full of important instruction to themselves. **THE CHRISTIAN SABBATH.**

With such awakenings, materials before them, they could have forgotten God? But to it

was—they profaned the sabbath day; that sabbath, which was to be a perpetual sign of

NEHEMIAH xiii. 17, 18.

Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said unto them, What evil thing is this that

ye do, and profane the sabbath day? Did not your fathers thus, and did not our God bring

all this evil upon us, and upon this city? Yet ye bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning

the sabbath, and have made it a scorn to the Christian Sabbath. It is notorious

THE nobles of Judah had lately beheld their civil polity overturned, and their

country ruined. Their city and their temple had been destroyed. They had lived in a

strange land, and for seventy years had borne the wrath of their God. That wrath had

now relented: they were lately returned from captivity, and though they were restored to

their privileges, they could not but weep over

the ruins of their city, and be affected with the devastations, the enemy had made. Whilst, under the conduct of Nehemiah, they were settling the holy city, they could not but view the sins of their fathers, and read a lesson full of important instruction to themselves. Who then could have imagined, that with such awakening memorials before them, they could have forgotten God? But so it was—they profaned the sabbath day; that sabbath, which was to be a perpetual sign of the covenant subsisting between him and his people. We might well be astonished at this, did we not know that great men are not always wise, that there is something in grandeur, which indisposes men for spiritual obedience; so that we have still reason to complain, that the noble, and honourable, profane the christian sabbath. It is notorious, that the love of pleasure, joined to a pretended freedom of thought, have produced irreligion: and irreligion recoils, with redoubled force, to strengthen those corruptions, which gave it birth. Hence, the Lord's day is dedicated, not to the Lord, but to pleasure, to dissipation, and every evil work. But vice, and irreligion, are infectious: countenanced by the great, they become objects of imitation
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to others, even to the lowest. And they, who would despise, or overlook, a good example, are ready to catch, and greedily embrace, every pattern, that is congenial to their own corruptions. It is the duty, consequently, of every faithful Nehemiah, and all spiritual watchmen, to warn, both great and small, of the guilt, and danger, of this glaring and growing impiety.

I shall, therefore, in the following discourse, endeavour to shew, first, the general obligation Christians are under to observe the christian sabbath; secondly, the evil and guilt of profaning it; and, thirdly, the danger arising from such a profanation, in bringing wrath upon a disobedient people.

And first, no sooner was man created, than the Lord sanctified one day in seven, for his peculiar worship; and the reason given is, that, on that day, God rested from all his works, which he had made. This day, therefore, he, from the beginning, exempted from labour, and consecrated to spiritual employments. A perpetual foundation this, for observing a day holy unto the Lord, so long as man is capable of beholding the glories of the creation with rational eyes, sensible of his

love, in bringing him into existence, and capable of paying him any service. That this sabbath should frequently return, is expedient, that a lively sense of God may be preserved in the soul, and a due thankfulness, for his renewed mercies, be continually excited. The goodness, then, and wisdom, of the creator, are manifested, in prescribing such a portion of our time for himself, as is equally suited to the exigencies of the body, and the necessities of the soul.

This commandment was first given, in the state of innocence, before sin, and death, and ruin, came. The sabbath was then necessary, though man, endowed with the divine resemblance, was ever ready to offer up the sweet increase of praise. Who, then, is there, amongst us, that can justly think himself exempt from that service, which was required of innocence; or refuse to submit his rebellious nature to that homage, which man, as yet unfallen, was commanded to pay? For, are there less means to be used for the recovery of the soul, than its preservation? No; the greater hazard requires the greater care; and if, before the fall, there was danger, lest man should transgress, now the transgression

is come; there is still greater danger, lest it should end in ruin.

But, as our nature is inferior to that of Adam, so is our employment. The earth itself is under a curse, through sin, and, as it were, unwillingly, gratifies our labours; we are bound, therefore, to consecrate those labours, by an holy rest, lest they should be accursed also. For, if fruitful paradise required a stated season of repose, much more do toil and labour; and, if the earth was unworthy of a continued attention, when it came out of the hands of its creator, surely it must be so, when the thorns and briers it produces, shew that it partakes of the common calamity.

However, though the justice of God is seen, in the labour the earth requires, the glory and majesty of the Creator are also seen, in every part of the creation. These still demand the praise and adoration of attentive minds; and, it seems to be one principal end of the institution of the sabbath, to preserve the attention of men to these things, and continue the divine worship, through succeeding generations, to the latest periods of time. Surely
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then, Christians cannot pay less regard to this institution, than those, who enjoyed only the occasional revelations of the divine will. They are equally concerned, in the works of God, with the patriarchs of old, and have still greater interest in the author of them. The divine promises, which they saw afar off, are fulfilled in us; and the redemption of man, has brightened all the works of God, with the beams of the most endearing love. It affords then new pleasure to contemplation, when the Christian considers, that God, reconciled in Christ, is the author of this wonderful frame, that he upholds it by his power, that he takes care of his elect, by forbidding all evil to approach them, and commands all things to work together for their good.

In process of time, this institution was renewed to the Jews, in memory of their deliverance out of the land of Egypt. "Remember," says Moses, "that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, that the Lord thy God brought thee out thence, through a mighty hand, and by a stretched out arm. Therefore, the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day." The manner, in which they were to observe it, was by an absolute

absolute rest, a memorial of their freedom, from the severity of their former bondage; and the penalty of their transgressing, was no less than death, as a punishment for their presumption and ingratitude.

We Christians are not concerned in this renewal of the sabbath, since what was peculiar to the Jews ceased with the abolition of their ceremonial worship, and gave way to a far better deliverance than theirs. "For this reason," says St. Paul, to the Colossians, "let no man judge you, in meat, or in drink, or in respect of the new moon, or of the sabbath day, which are a shadow of things to come, but the body is of Christ." The substance, then, continues after the shadow is vanished away; the moral part of the obligation is enforced upon us, by commemorating our Lord's resurrection, and the jewish sabbath changed to the first day of the week, by the practice and appointment of the Apostles.

And can it be a question, with Christians, whether they are bound to celebrate their redemption? Through this, reconciliation between God and man, harmony between heaven and earth, are established. The privilege of

of sons is again restored, and the inheritance purchased and reserved by Him, who hath made our deliverance complete. So that our redemption is our second, and much better, creation. The pious Christian, therefore, thankfully accepts the gift, and as often as the Lord's day returns, looks upon it as the day, on which he was begotten to a lively hope, by the resurrection of Christ from the dead. Let *those* profane it, who are aliens to the love of Christ, who receive no pleasure from remembering him, whom they have offended. Let *those* profane it, who have no sense of duty, and study to divest themselves of the fears of conscience. The Christian is called by the voice of love, and gratitude, to devote that day to him, on which he triumphed over death, vanquished Satan, and opened the doors of heaven to all believers, *as though he had*

But further, if we consider the state, and condition, of religion in this world, the sanctification of the Christian sabbath is necessary to preserve it. Christianity, like it's author, in his state of humiliation, is like a tender plant in an unkindly soil. It is exposed to the storms of life: it requires some intervals of repose; it thirsts after the dew of
divine

divine refreshment, and longs for the beams of the sun of righteousness. On the Lord's day especially, this sun is unveiled; it cheers the faithful, and revives the contrite, by displaying the riches of the kingdom of Christ. Here, the mysteries of the Gospel are made known to the ignorant, and the objects of sense, and the tumultuous scenes are removed from the busy, that they may recollect their ways, and be fortified against temptation. Here, likewise, the service God requires, is fixed upon the conscience, and those terrors declared, which are to be the portion of the disobedient. Thus is the sense of religion preserved, and sin kept under some restraint; and though profaneness, and irreligion, are not banished from the world, they raise not an unbounded empire of vice and infidelity.

But, true believers receive a peculiar benefit from the Lord's day, of which they, who are yet in their sins, do not partake. One day in the courts of God, is to them better than a thousand. Here, they quit the cares of life, and labour for that meat, which endureth unto everlasting life. Attentive to the voice of their beloved, their hearts burn within them, when the circumstances of his life, and death,

death, and glory are recounted. Nor is their solitude unfruitful: prayer and praise follow them into their retirements, and diffuse a serenity over their whole souls. Happy, then, is this day to them, as it prepares them for the enjoyment of a better world, that eternal sabbath, which is the proper rest of their souls.

I proceed, secondly, to shew the evil, and guilt, of the profanation of the Lord's day. It shews a disposition to transgress not so much in one partial instance of duty, as to offend against all religion whatever. The sabbath breaker disowns both providence, and redemption, and is equally regardless of the works of nature and of grace. Though bound to a daily consecration of himself to God, through Christ, he denies the obligation of spending one day, as God requires. Irreligion is thus formed into an habit, the restraints of conscience are gradually worn off, and men at length commence practical atheists. Thus hardened in their sins, it is to be feared, they will then only be sensible of their magnitude and their number, when they are called before the judgment seat of Christ, and shall be forced to acknowledge, that the Lord will

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not hold them guiltless, that profane the sabbath-day. Some there are that violate the christian sabbath, by idleness and stupid indolence. They use it literally as a day of rest, a sabbath of oxen and asses, and knowing no other than bodily labours, for six days in the week, they forget that on this, they are called to the work of grace, and of God. Hence, the Lord's day brings with it no profit to the generality of men. Instead of employing it to edification, they are walking in the streets, or in the fields; or they are slumbering upon the bed of sloth, and shew that this sordid idol, has more influence upon them, than the duty they owe to the best of beings. Thus instead of redeeming the time, they throw away golden opportunities, and sell the glories of eternity, that they may spend one day in the week, like the beasts that perish.

Others there are, who employ the Lord's day, in their worldly business. Six days are allowed them, by the great proprietor of their time, for this purpose: the other he requires, as a mark of their acknowledgement of this. They admit not the claim, since they dedicate none to his service. To him they owe all their prosperity and success, yet they dis-

trust his providence, and plainly discover, that they prefer their trade and their merchandise, before the God of their salvation. Oh, how insatiable is the God of this world, for he devours our time, and yet hides eternity from our eyes!

As these offend through an attachment to worldly profit, others transgress through the love of pleasure. Now, pleasure is ever an enemy to the christian life, by engrossing our precious time, by administering fewel to the carnal mind, by indisposing us for God. It is one great end of the christian sabbath, that watchfulness and meditation should prevent this flattering syren from corrupting our souls, or even entering into our consecrated temples. By means of these, a spiritual joy rises within us of a far superior nature to the pleasures of the world. These it keeps within their proper bounds: but losing this sweet companion, we lose our guard. The love of pleasure, then, predominates; our lusts get the ascendancy: and, as if *they* were not guilty enough of themselves, God's own day is sacrilegiously invaded, and prostituted to their indulgence. Another method of violating the

Lord's

Lord's day is by neglecting public worship. Christians are called, as one body, into one place. Some refuse to come through perverseness, and conceit, and the love of separation; others, through profaneness. The former cruelly divide that church, which ought to be united: the latter, like mortified limbs, are torn off from the body of Christ. Gratitude can lay no hold upon men of corrupt minds. They receive many public mercies from God, every day in the week, yet will not acknowledge them one day, in a public manner. They are called to testify their adherence to those vows they made unto Christ, at their baptism: but, having broken them by an unholy life, they abhor all communion with him, and spend the christian sabbath in a manner suitable to their whole conduct, and in any other place than the house of God. Why will they thus persist in rebellion, and hold out against the gracious calls of mercy? For, this is the place, where pardon is offered to the penitent, and grace is freely given to those that seek it. And, oh, may the spirit of God at length prevail, that these withered branches may be rescued from the fire, and bring forth fruit unto life eternal!

But

But, thirdly, Nehemiah, you have seen in the text, threatens that God will bring more wrath upon Israel, for profaning the sabbath. The Jews had before suffered for this very sin. Their returning to it aggravated their crime. The divine mercy, and their recovered privileges, made their apostacy the more inexcusable. Presumption marked their guilt, and, if God were to enter into any judgment with them, would prevent the pleadings of any further mercy. In this threatening, my brethren, we may read a lesson to ourselves. It cannot be denied but we have carried the sins of this holy day, much further than the Jews. Our obligations are greater than theirs, so are our offences likewise, more numerous, more abundant, more provoking. Indeed, one or two of our Sunday enormities have lately been checked by the legislature: but a great number still remain, some of which are specious, others without a mask; and many of them, I am persuaded, it will be impossible to stop by any human laws, so great is the boldness of these times, and the licence of this country. What then remains but God's judgment, who sometimes says to a rebellious people, that would neither be won, nor terrified, into submission, "Hitherto shalt thou come,

come, but no further, and here shall thy proud career be stayed."

But the efficacy of these sins, upon our general conduct, affords reason for the same forebodings. Their very tendency is ruinous: Sabbath breakers quickly become either open blasphemers, or insolent in their manners, or impudent sinners. This engages a just and holy God to make them feel his indignation, and teach them, by various calamities, that there is a God, who judgeth the earth. Nay, though individuals should escape all temporal punishment, and after many unhallowed sabbaths, go down to the grave in peace, yet ~~there~~ their profane rest will be changed into unspeakable woe, and they, who in this life refused to spend one day with God, will spend an eternity with Satan and his angels.

Remember, then, O ye parents, ye masters, ye magistrates, if ye have any love for the souls of men, suffer not those committed to your care to ruin themselves, by the wanton abuse of a short time, which they will not be able to redeem, in the sufferings of endless ages. If you have any regard to the glory of God, any gratitude for a Redeemer's

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love, let them not be trampled on, without your testifying an abhorrence of the evil, and endeavouring to prevent it.

And, oh, let all that hear me this day, resolve immediately to live as becomes the creatures of God, and the redeemed of the Lord. Let not this day pass, nor the remaining sabbaths return upon us, without some profit to our souls, in preparing us for that awful change, which is not far distant from any, and may be very near indeed to some amongst us : that, whenever the master calls, we may be ready, and receive our summons as those, that have long waited for his coming. And, oh, may we all of us so entertain him here below, as our most welcome guest, that he may guide and comfort us in this valley of tears, and when we depart hence, may receive us into his blessed fold !

Now, to God the Father, &c.

SERMON III.

PUBLIC WORSHIP.

HEBREWS x. 25.

*Not forsaking the assembling yourselves together,
as the manner of some is.*

THE Hebrew converts, in the times of persecution, could not assemble together for public worship, without being exposed to the fury of the unbelieving Jews. Accordingly some of them preferred their temporal ease, to the cross of Christ: and those blasts, which should have inflamed their zeal, in reality extinguished it. The same effect, which persecution produced with a few of *them*, the lukewarmness of the present age, has wrought with many of *us*. Great numbers amongst us are, during their whole lives, strangers to religious assemblies. A cloud of ignorance and sensuality hides from them their duty, and their privileges. Others there are,

who are content with a very partial attendance upon the church. They come to the house of God by chance, perhaps by humour, and, by the same humour, are often diverted from it. It may be, sloth and indolence intervene, and dispose them for God. Or, an attachment to the business of the world engrosses the sacred hours, and betrays their irreligion. A third sort there is, who come to hear, and to pray in the Lord's house, but give no attendance at the Lord's table. Strange inconsistency! By the former, they acknowledge their Lord; by the latter, they deny him. "I pray thee have me excused," is the voice of multitudes. They regard no consequences: they would keep their sins and their religion too. But indeed they cannot, for this one rebuke is kept for them in store, "Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?"

Thus we have lived to see the time, in which the love of many is grown cold. So that wanting the life and energy of religion, their very duties are forced and flaccid. What wonder is it, then, that they regard the church, rather as a prison to the body, than a refreshment to the soul; that they approach

the divine presence with indifference, if not with disgust, and generally forego that heavenly banquet, which is provided for them. So that they cannot say with the pious Psalmist, "Like as the hart desireth the water-brooks; so longeth my soul after thee, O God. My soul is athirst for God, yea, even for the living God: when shall I come to appear before the presence of God?" Nor can they assume to themselves that noble eulogy, which is recorded of the prophetess Anna; that "she continued daily in the temple, and served God with fastings and prayers, night and day."

It would be happy for us, were we blessed with many such examples as these. Religion would then appear in its proper lustre, and our churches would be filled with pious worshippers, and devout communicants. Nor would that fervency, which is so natural to devotion, be immured in closets, or afraid of the presence of a multitude. But alas! instead of exhorting one another, as the Apostle directs, we are cold and negligent in this matter. This negligence adds to the general depravity, whilst it gives way, like the sand, to the torrent of corruption.

Q. 3. That

That I may quicken those, that are remiss in frequenting public worship, and reprove those, who stupidly neglect or impiously deride it, I shall endeavour to set before you, first, the obligation to the duty, and secondly, the evils which arise from forsaking the assembling ourselves together.

And first, public worship is expedient for every Christian, as it is an ordinary *means of grace*, and a preserver of religion in the soul. For it is in the church, where Christians meet their Lord, who is the author and dispenser of every good gift, and whose grace is sufficient to supply all their wants. The devout worshippers under the law went to the temple, and found the God of Israel there. Under the Gospel the same privilege is to be expected. "Where two or three," says Christ, "are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Thy spirit, O Lord, will diffuse its virtue among all that wait on thee. It will bless their prayers, and sanctify their praises, and present them before the throne of God. Upon this virtue we depend, when we come into these courts. We are assured, that the blessings which we seek devoutly, we shall surely find; that

that the praises which we cordially offer, will find acceptance before him; and that his word, which we hear with reverence, will be grafted within us, and bring forth fruit. But these blessings we cannot expect to find, if we do not seek them, where the promises are made. It is allowed, indeed, that private devotion is necessary also, and brings with it its reward. This cannot, however, supersede the public ordinances of religion: it supposes the use of all other means of grace, so far is it from absolving us from any one christian duty. But the true Christian seeks not to be absolved. He wants no arguments to damp his longings after God, or slacken his diligence in the Lord's work. He has too deep a sense of his own unprofitableness, not to breathe after still higher attainments. He calls every means to his aid, to gain the end of his high calling, nobly animated with the glory of the prize, and the love of that God, who bestows it. How different is he, who refuses to frequent the house of God! He rejoices not in that presence, which fills this place with gladness, and heaven with glory. He hungers not after that righteousness, which is here administered; he rejects it, when it is offered, without price. He is called to express his sorrow

for his sins, but he confines it, if he sorrows at all, within his own breast. He is called to shew his gratitude, but his sense of divine mercies is stifled, in dumb and silent acknowledgments. By renouncing the public exercises of religion, he foregoes the benefits resulting from them. By refusing to pray in public, he has no just confidence that God will hear him in private, or that *that* presence will attend him in solitude, into which he is invited to come, and rejects the invitation. So that whatever these despisers pretend before men, our Saviour may justly say of them, as of the unbelieving Jews, "Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life."

But farther, public worship is not only a means of grace, it is also a *necessary duty*. God is an universal parent, who gives us life and breath, and daily fills us with unnumbered blessings, common to all rational creatures, and the more to be valued on that account. But a public benefactor can only be acknowledged by a public adoration of him. We condemn the baseness of that man, who is too ungenerous to own a kindness received from his fellow-creatures: what then

shall we say of those, who are debtors to the divine bounty, and daily continue to receive it with an open hand, yet will not open their mouths to declare his praise? Wretched men! who add year to year sustained by the hand of God, yet grudge him the tribute of one single day. What can be more general than the influences of the heavens, and the fruitfulness of the earth? And shall we enjoy them with insensibility, or pretend to a solitary gratitude? The very brute creatures, which testify their joy, when fed by the great provider, condemn such sordidness of mind. On the contrary, the true believer overflows with gratitude, and he esteems it his privilege, as well as his duty, to make his acknowledgments as public as he can, to declare the honour of the Lord in the midst of the congregation, and praise him in the seat of the elders.

Nor does the sincere Christian forget, that he is a member of the body of Christ; bound, therefore, to meet his fellow-christians, to shew his christian fellowship, and his relation to Christ, his head. Our Lord himself created this society, commanded all believers to be baptized into it, and instituted pastors and

teachers,

teachers, "for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come, in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." Indeed, all Christians cannot now meet in the same place, to join in the united bands of worship. This must be reserved for the church triumphant, in the regions above. Nevertheless, we, then, truly communicate with the catholick church, when we communicate with that part of it, wherein we live. And as there is one body, and one spirit, "even as we are called in one hope of our calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God, and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in us all;" so there is no room for schism, and separation, in this body. It is by this communion, that believers derive from Christ the same graces with their dispersed brethren, these graces descending from above, in the christian ordinances, and lighting upon those who diligently seek them there. On the contrary; by forsaking this communion, as we lose all benefit from the ministry of the word, so we are separated from the head, even "Christ, from whom, the whole body," except that unworthy
part,

part, "fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working of the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body, to the edifying of itself in love." It is, indeed, into this body we have, in our infancy, been baptized. But this will be of no avail, if, arriving at the use of reason, we retract our engagements, and abide not in the vine, but are torn off from the living stock, and are cast forth as unprofitable and devoted branches. The original privileges, to which we are entitled, are great and glorious. But great also, and dreadful, will be our punishment, when we declare, that we had rather forfeit them all, than so much as attend to our obligations, or hearken to the invitations of our Lord. Nay, it will add to our condemnation, that after we are given and consecrated to God, we desert his service, and go over to the enemy of souls. Oh! that the dead, the twice dead, the spiritually dead, could see the beauty of the Lord in his house of prayer, and obey his affectionate voice, inviting, beseeching, intreating them to rise from sin; that so, being awakened from their sleep of death, they might engraft their withered hearts on him, and bring forth the fruits of righteousness!

But,

But, secondly, I proceed to shew the great evils arising from forsaking the assembling ourselves together. Without a public acknowledgement of God, we overlook the relation we stand in to him. This is itself no little sin. The soul of man is naturally debased with sensuality, and acquires an increasing attachment to those enjoyments, which are suited to its vitiated nature; if then it be unchecked in its career, by public and frequent memorials of its duty, it becomes more and more debased. By forgetting God, man forgets his own depravity; he entertains lofty opinions of his vile condition; he prides himself in his own littleness; he assumes a false and borrowed character. The powers of the present world take possession of him, and direct both his principles and practice, with uncontrouled authority. When the neglect of public worship becomes constant and habitual, the consciences of men are daily made more insensible, and themselves more regardless of the divine commands, till having, by degrees, forgotten the remembrance of their duty, at length they are hardened in ignorance; they know not God, and profanely care not for him. The reason is this—his secret admonitions they will not obey—his public calls they will not hear.

There-

Therefore, they say unto God, depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways.

Indeed, the evils which spring from the want of a public profession of religion, are not smothered within, but spread their influence abroad. The example of every irreligious man, tends to weaken the authority of the divine laws, and propagate the same principles, within the compass of his sphere. Those parents and masters, who seldom or never attend divine worship, will hardly be serious in making their household more religious than themselves. Will they not rather encourage their propensity to negligence, and render the admonition of others without effect? Their neighbourhood, their friendship, is contagious: others are ready to catch the sin, and distribute it, in their turn. You, yourselves, may observe, that in those unhappy places, and even throughout this whole metropolis, where a multitude conspire in forsaking the christian assemblies, there other sacred duties are neglected, ordinances are despised, decency and good manners are set at nought, but profaneness abounds, and every evil work is encouraged. But,
how

how dreadful would be these evils, were all external regard of the Deity banished from amongst men? What barrier would be strong enough for human wickedness, without the sense of an all-seeing eye, or the dread of an avenger? What faith could we expect in commerce, when there would be no conscience of secret frauds, and the most artful dealer would be the wisest man? What dependence on oaths, when the false swearer would have nothing to raise his fears? What security could we have of property, and life itself, when *both* would lie at the mercy of brutal appetite, or lawless power? How dismal is this prospect! and I am forced to add, that *great* must be the fault of those, who at all contribute to such an extremity of degenerate manners.

Will it be necessary to pursue this subject, and say, that public irreligion shews that a man is ashamed of the Gospel of Christ; nay, of Christ himself? Some are so accustomed to turn the most sacred things into ridicule, that the very outward garb of religion is too serious, and decent, for them. Others are afraid of the imputation of devotion, and therefore seldom approach the Lord's house,
and

and disregard, when they are there, both his word and presence. But let us reflect a little. Who is he, of whom they are thus ashamed? It is one, who hath loved us even unto death, who continues his love, and exerts it on our behalf, who hath purchased pardon for sinful creatures, and calls them to accept it. Nay, he entreats, and all but compels, the unrelenting to be reconciled to God. But whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, the government is laid upon his shoulder, and he hath authority given him to be the judge of quick and dead. Be not ashamed then to own your Lord. Oh! *dread* this imputation, lest ye be confounded at the last, and Christ should deny *you*, before men and angels.

But, lastly, may all of you, my brethren, be duly sensible of the great privilege of meeting your Lord, in this holy place, and take every opportunity of confirming, here, your union with him, and with your brethren! Those, who are confined by sickness, or decrepit with age, can only long after the courts of the Lord, as Israelites in a strange land: but let health and vigour plead no excuse. It would be well, if they, whom Providence

providence has placed above the necessities
 of a penurious calling, would also, on the
 week days, fill their vacant seats, that,
 amongst other pious uses of the unrighteous
 mammon, by a wise oeconomy, and grateful
 attention, they may increase their spiritual
 blessings also, in Christ Jesus; and, whilst
 others are labouring for the meat that perish-
 eth, they may attain a double portion of the
 divine spirit, and lay up for themselves a
 better and an enduring substance. Especially,
 let all, whether rich or poor, lay hold of every
 occasion of receiving the blessed supper of the
 Lord. If you are sincere, though you are
 weak in the faith, and unstable in the christian
 warfare, this is an effectual means to restore
 and strengthen you. If you are already strong,
 you will long for every opportunity to renew
 your vows before your Lord, and declare your
 affection towards him. Come, then, into the
 courts of the Lord, not led by form and
 custom, or in order to preserve your character
 with men. Come not, here, with the vain
 purpose of raising your accounts with heaven,
 or the desire of soothing your consciences, by
 putting on the semblance of religion. Oh!
 come not to hear the preacher, with conceited
 ears, that you may exercise the miserable
 criticisms

criticisms of your own weak and erring judgment. Much less come, with the worst, and most depraved of all other motives, that you may seek the doctrines suited to a licentious conscience, (like multitudes, who hunt in crowds after *antinomian* principles,) which tend to relax your obligations, to hide your duty from your view, and mark a way to heaven, which exists only in a heated imagination. But come, with a desire to be instructed in the whole oracles of God, to have your hearts directed, to be encouraged in the race that lies before you, and enabled to persevere, through the divine mercy, in those humble and pious duties, which are the crown of your faith, and essential to your acceptance with God. Thus, edified and enlivened, you will not be like children, tossed to and fro with every blast of doctrine, ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. But, as you have begun well, you will go on, more and more, unto perfection. Whether you pray, you will pray with a sense of your own unworthiness, and faith in the divine promises; with united fervours, you will address your Father, which is in heaven.—Whether you hear, you will apply what you hear to yourselves, as most

concerned, and interested in it. You will then meet your Lord, as often as you can, and make the affectionate acknowledgement of Peter, "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life." Thus actuated and engaged in his service, the house of God will, indeed, be to you the gate of heaven, where you will renew your praises, with vigour undecayed, and sing in an universal chorus of joy, "Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him, that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb, for ever and ever."

SERMON IV.

THE DISCIPLES GOING TO EMMAUS.

LUKE xxiv. 32.

And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?

THIS is the reflection made by two disciples of our Lord, to whom he appeared the same day, on which he rose, in their journey to Emmaus. He had reasoned with them out of the scriptures, and expounded unto them the things concerning himself. Their eyes indeed were holden, that is, restrained by a secret influence, that they did not know him. If he had spoken in his own character, and they had known the much loved voice of their Lord, their astonishment would perhaps have been too great for their attention, and taken it off from his discourse

to him, who made it. But appearing as a stranger, his words operated by their own weight and energy; they entered into their hearts, and caused a glow in their affections. Well might they have this effect; he could speak of nothing more interesting, more persuasive.

Before we pursue this subject, it will be proper to observe, that the evidence of our Lord's resurrection, was the stronger from the slowness and incredulity even of his own disciples. Two of them, we find, the very day he was risen, though they had received the testimony of his being alive from the women and the angels,—though he had himself foretold it in express language, and the very end and completion of his divine mission depended upon it, yet were overwhelmed with sadness, and could only say, "We trusted that it had been he, which should have redeemed Israel." This gave our Lord the opportunity to open their understandings, to take away their remaining prejudices with respect to the temporal kingdom of Christ, and to shew them, from the scriptures, the evidence, both of his sufferings and glory. So that when he was afterwards known of them, in breaking of bread, the proof

that

that he was the Messiah, since he had been dead, and was alive again, must strike so forcibly upon their minds, as to render them the most undoubted witnesses to others.

There are a variety of topics, in this interview, which are worthy our serious consideration. But I shall confine myself, at present, to the honest and edifying confession in the text, "Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened unto us the scriptures?"

The heart, we know, is the seat of the affections. The affections are wrought upon by objects, that are suited, in their nature, to excite them. But of all the objects that can interest man, religion surely is the most awful and awakening. It would be so, had men no other light, than what their own reason could afford them. But, when we consider the abundant sources of knowledge, that are opened by revelation, and that these relate to the nature, the duty, the end, and destination of man,—that the cause and consequence of sin is laid open,—that his restoration is pointed out,—and his probation is big with important issues, in future worlds,—then, the admonition

of the prophet will appear most just and reasonable, "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth, for the Lord hath spoken;" and that of the royal teacher, "My son, give me thine heart." Every thing is great and affecting here. Every call is loud to the awakening ear. Every good we enjoy, and every evil we experience, are of little importance, when duly compared with the still greater good we expect, and the more pungent evils we dread hereafter.

But the truths of religion, striking as they are in themselves, are made still more affecting by the person, through whom they are conveyed to us. The scriptures hold out to us one grand plan of redemption. This plan from the beginning, bore reference to a Redeemer, first pointed out to us by the seed of the woman, then the seed of Abraham, afterwards typified by the paschal lamb. In process of time, he was more clearly revealed, and his sufferings were foretold; he is described as a "man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, smitten of God and afflicted, pouring out his soul unto death, numbered with the transgressors, and bearing the sin of many." But then his soul was not to be "left in hell, nor his

his flesh to see corruption." He is further described as "the Son of God,"—as a Prince, whose throne was to endure for ever,—the King of glory,—the hope of the ends of the earth." To find all these declarations fulfilled in Christ, and the seeming contradictions of a suffering and triumphant Redeemer reconciled in him, and in him only, must surely raise the desponding, and confirm the weakest faith. Moreover, when we consider that this grand plan was gradually opening, till it arrived at its complete accomplishment, and that the inspired writers, however distant in time, whether kings, or priests, or prophets, all conspire, in one spirit of harmony, to prepare the world for its approach, surely we must be struck with this astonishing display of the power, the veracity, the wisdom, and the love of God. Whatever prejudices, therefore, the two disciples, mentioned in the text, might labour under, when they were told that the sufferings were necessary to his mediatorial glories, they could be no longer scandalized at the cross. They could no longer expect the temporal exaltation of the Jewish state, when the spiritual kingdom of the Messiah was proved to be the grand object of his sufferings.

If to have the gospel in the Old Testament unfolded, will have this very striking effect, how will the devout disciple be affected, upon the view of the sufferings and glory of his Redeemer actually accomplished! Our eyes are now no longer holden, with respect to the person of Christ. We know that it is he, who hath redeemed Israel, and given himself a ransom for the sins of men. Lord, what is man, that thou shouldest thus regard him! When we contemplate thee, as surrounded with divine glories, before the world was, we are struck with profound reverence; but, when we behold thee in thy gracious word, as humbling thyself to take our nature, to rescue us from ruin, sinful as we are, and exalt us to thine own kingdom, then is our reverence mixt with love. To hear thy love recorded,—to trace thee in thy lovely paths, blessing thousands with thy glorious light, filling the hungry, and what is more, replenishing the hungry soul,—to behold thy godlike actions clothed with meekness, and thy example still accompanying, and equalling thy precepts; if we are at all capable of being won by mildness, by kindness, by lowliness, by purity unrivalled, by love unequalled, surely we cannot be
unaf-

unaffected by the pattern, which thou hast left us.

If we carry our views forward to the sufferings and the death of Christ, what source of sympathy is there in the human breast, that is not laid open. Are we touched at suffering innocence?—who was so spotless as the Lamb of God? Without guile himself, he became the sport of malice; breathing good will to men, he raised the hatred of men against him. Nor content with reviling, they demanded his life. And when this victim was brought, as a lamb to the slaughter, though he was declared to be the “Son of God,” he was treated with indignities, due only to the vilest of the sons of men. Forsaken by his own disciples, the divine consolations, that supported him, seemed to be withdrawn, when, without guilt himself, he endured those unknown horrors, which are due to guilt. When, in this extremity, he prayed for his crucifiers, they were untouched with remorse; yet surely, could they but have known the agonies, which he endured, malice itself must have relented. Had they but known, that he was dying for *them*, surely they must have been touched with such sorrows,

forrows, and such love. But we, my brethren, do know this. We can pursue the footsteps of a dying redeemer; we are apprized of the nature, though not of the depth of his agonies. We know that his death was necessary, in God's decree; and that divine justice required a ransom, equal to the offence against it. Such knowledge duly improved, must fill us with astonishment, at the surpassing love of Christ, who undertook to pay this ransom, and to drink the bitterest cup of God's wrath, lest it should be poured on our guilty heads. The proper effect is, compunction for our own sins, that had their share in these woes, lest the Redeemer should have suffered for them, and we should die in them.

But as the death of Christ calls forth the tears of penitence and sympathy, so his resurrection lays such a sure foundation of hope within us, as dispels the fears of a foreboding conscience. Through sin, came death; all sin, and consequently all die. He, therefore, who had subdued the power of sin, by his death, rose again to assert his triumphs over death itself. Well then may the Apostle say, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and

and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory, through Jesus Christ our Lord." In this exultation, will every true believer join, and not be afraid to descend into the grave, since he knows that his Redeemer lives, and that as many as sleep in Jesus, them will God bring with him.

Having confirmed his mission, by his resurrection from the dead, he established also the certainty of his future promises. He then entered into his glory, and took possession of his mediatorial throne, that, having purchased a kingdom by his sufferings, all who are the sons of God, and co-heirs with him, might be admitted into it. Can we read its glories displayed, and not be struck with an ardent desire to receive a place in our father's mansions, that if there were only a possibility of admission, we might obtain it? But when we find ourselves invited there, surely we must be exceedingly affected with the unsearchable riches of divine love. And should we experience this love, shed abroad in our hearts, we cannot then but look up with joy, and anticipate our future triumphs.

The religion of Christ, then, is an experimental thing. It warms the heart, and governs the affections. From its very nature, it works upon our hopes and fears. It calls forth our love, our gratitude, our praise. It produces trust, and confidence, in the divine mercies. It assuages the griefs of the afflicted, it raises the desponding, and, in the midst of darkness, affords a gleam of light. When outward comforts fail, it forsakes us not; in the storms of life, it diffuses a serenity all around us. But let us remember, that if we rejoice under its comforts, it must be with trembling; it will bear no foreign mixture of our own vanity, pride, and selfishness. The leaven of our miserable passions, and fanatical conceits, will deform its beauty, and at length corrupt it.

Consider, likewise, the genuine effect of a warm and devoted heart—obedience to the will of God. For, can we be truly affected with the life of his blessed Son, and not endeavour to copy his example? Can we love him, for the benefits he hath bestowed upon us, and not manifest our love, by the best offering we can pay him, the service of our hearts? How vain to pretend an attachment

ment to our Lord, and not regard his own declarations, "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you," and, "Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" Can we plead his merits before the throne of God, and yet injuriously make him the minister of sin? Or, can we expect to behold his glory, in the highest heavens, and not be prepared, by purity of heart, and holiness of life, for the sacred joys of that blissful place?

From the preceding topics we may learn, that the truths of religion operate by their own intrinsic weight. Our Saviour expounded to the two disciples, out of the scriptures, the things concerning himself. He proved the necessity of his sufferings, and the certainty of his future glory, from the Old Testament, and made their hearts burn within them. But, in the Gospel, every thing, relative to his divine mission, is already and clearly opened. We have the key put into our hands, which explains the tendency, and use, of every preceding dispensation. Though, therefore, we did not hear his divine discourse, we have before us the substance of what he uttered. And who is there amongst us, that is not deeply and entirely interested therein? If we are saved,

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it is by the ransom paid by Christ, and his intercession at the throne of mercy. If regardless of these truths, we depend upon our own strength, or trust to the broken reeds of our own righteousness, or disown him for our Lord, and boldly venture to appear before him laden with guilt, then there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin:—then judgment follows, and the divine vengeance, against every worker of iniquity.

These things our Lord, as well as the first preachers of his gospel, were content to represent in plain and weighty language. And should there be any of you, my brethren, who require the aids of eloquence to set off these manifest truths,—if they cannot gain your attention, when not delivered with a pleasing voice, and attended by nothing but their own importance, then *should* your hearts burn within you, when you hear them thus recommended, it is to be feared your warmth will be as transient, as the cause that gave it birth: and your transports will be as void of substance, as the woes of a tragedy, or the scenery of some pleasant tale.

You see, then, my brethren, what is requisite for real edification, simplicity of heart to receive,

receive, and earnestness to imbibe, the truths of God. Then, by whomsoever they are delivered, they will not be in vain. Whether the word is read or preached, it will not be heard with profane carelessness, or wanton inattention; the heart will not wander, nor the fancy be disgusted; but, the good seed will descend into the heart, as into a kindly soil. No ravenous birds of prey will instantly take it away: no stoney ground will prevent its striking deep: no cares, and pleasures of this life, will grow up with it, and choke it: but, it will take root downwards, and bring forth fruit unto life eternal. This simplicity of heart makes the true disciple willing to receive the truth, as it is in Jesus. He applies the grand points of religion to his own soul, and seeks nothing further. He entertains no curious researches, nor strange doctrines, nor presumes to determine disputable points. He is modestly content with plain maxims, and therefore hunts after no food for religious vanity, or self-opinion. He desires no more knowledge than is fitting, and waits, till the full enlargement of his faculties, in future worlds, shall give him the glorious display of divine love, when the depth that is now unfathomable will be revealed, and he will be able

able to soar to that height, which is now overspread with darkness. If we keep these rules in view, religious discourse will be very useful to animate the slow, and inform the ignorant. Herein, we have our Saviour's example before us. He reprov'd the inattention of his own disciples; but, at the same time, he opened their understandings, and warmed their hearts. Indeed, how can we better employ the gift of language, than upon the noblest of all subjects? To speak for God, is to use the faculty, which God has given us, in the best manner. To edify one another, is the noblest act of charity. Though we have no silver, or gold, to give, we may impart the superior treasures of a well-informed understanding, and friendly mind.

But, lastly, let me then admonish you, my brethren, not to be content merely to hear these truths repeated, but to read, mark, learn, digest them, that they may be engrafted into your very souls, and ready to be exerted in the whole tenor and conduct of your lives. Then you will not only love the privileges, but the duties of your calling.—You will receive every declaration of your Lord with becoming reverence.—You will be attentive

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to the finer commands of Christ, and be studious not only of knowing, but practising his most neglected precepts. Then will his words be, indeed, unto you the words of eternal life. And his religion, thus affectionately received, will become the great cordial of your lives, and your exultation at the hour of death. Your meditation upon him will be sweet, and he will give you grace for grace. Whenever he calls, you will be ready, and be able to say, with heartfelt sincerity, "Whom, having not seen, we love, in whom believing, though now we see him not, we rejoice, with joy unspeakable, and full of glory."

To whom, with the Father, and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory ascribed, now and for evermore.

SERMON V.

CHRIST OUR EXAMPLE.

JOHN ii. 6.

*He that saith he abideth in him, ought himself
also so to walk, even as he walked.*

IN the primitive age, as well as the present, there were many, who forgot their character, and their calling. They professed to believe in Christ, but converted his salutary Gospel into the nourishment of their own corruptions. Wherefore, St. John, after having represented Jesus as the propitiation for our sins, shews us *what* is the real evidence of an interest in him. "He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him, verily, is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him." He then holds forth to be-
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lievers the example of Christ, whose life was a copy of his own precepts, and enforces them in the most edifying manner. "He that saith he abideth in him, ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked."

I shall, therefore, in the following discourse, first, endeavour to set before you the general obligations you are under to follow the example of Christ; and secondly, specify a few particular virtues of his life, and shew in what manner they ought to influence your practice.

And first, the excellency of the example of Christ is a very powerful motive to recommend it to us. It is no less than that of God incarnate. Christ, who was the brightness of God's glory, and the express image of his person, took our nature upon him, that he might shew us the perfection of that nature. In this, we may survey the imitable perfections of the Godhead passing before us, and veiling their glory, in condescension to our imperfections. Indeed, neither the natural attributes of God, nor the miraculous works of Christ, fall within the compass of our power, or the limits of our imitation. But the moral per-

fections of both, we are invited, and commanded to follow. "Be ye followers of God, as dear children, and be ye perfect, even as your Father, which is in heaven, is perfect." And St. Peter enjoins us, "as he that called you is holy, so be ye holy, in all manner of conversation." This, then, is our scope and glorious ambition, to aim at, though we can never attain, the summit of such gracious perfections. An ambition this, that aspires not after the renown, that attends on worldly reputation, or the applause of a popular character, but contends for the highest excellency of our nature, and the happiness of becoming like the Son of God. It is founded, indeed, in poverty of spirit, and the peculiar virtues of the Gospel of Christ; but, it is deeply rooted in the heart, and claims an alliance with heaven. It is not subject to the injuries, nor is it regulated by the fashions, of the time; and though discountenanced by the world, it will survive it's ruin, and be applauded before men and angels.

The relation also we bear to Christ, is another inducement to follow his example. He hath paid the price of our redemption; and we are, in the most solemn manner, devoted
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to his service. We call him Lord, and we say well. But this is a mere nominal profession, and we must have some other marks, before we can be such as he will own. The nature of his service is spiritual: and he, who partakes of his spirit, is gradually brought to have the same mind that was in Christ Jesus. When the mind is proselyted, great examples have great force, to bring the whole man to a conformity with them. This is true, even in the children of this world. The followers of a court are ambitious to be like their prince. The heathens, who worshipped gods of the same passions with themselves, imitated their vices, and their crimes. The followers of Mahomet follow his temper and disposition also: hypocrisy, jealousy and lust, bigotry and fanaticism, a thirst of dominion, and, the sword of vengeance, attend them, wherever they prevail. Nay, all the children of Satan are consistent with themselves, and the works of their father they will do. Shall Christians, then, pay less regard to the character of Jesus, who pretend to be the members of his body, and the soldiers, who contend in his warfare? They will not, if they are worthy of his name: they cannot, if they are led by his spirit.

They will learn of him, for it will be their ambition to resemble him; they will follow him, though with unequal steps: and as by his great redemption, he hath acquired a right to their services, both love and duty will impel them to imitate his virtues, even in the severest trials.

The life of Christ, indeed, from the very nature of it, wore a peculiar aspect towards man. His virtues were applicable to every condition; and whilst he seemed studious to discharge every common duty, it was, that he might fulfil all righteousness. And had he given no precept to his followers, his example spake, and still speaks, in silent, yet persuasive, language, "Go, and do thou likewise." Thus, "he was the true light, which lighteth every man, that cometh into the world." And we are, by the divine appointment, predestinated to be "conformed to his image, that he might be the first-born among many brethren." Where, then, is the man that bears his name, who can possibly imagine he has no concern in this? Is it possible, that we should read his history, as if it bore no relation to us, or merely to admire those virtues, which we will not imitate?

Or, which is still more to be lamented, shall we behold, with indifference, the splendor of his virtues, or throw the veil of forgetfulness over them? Then, indeed, we lose our guide, and our director. Content with our ignorance, or taking refuge in self-conceit, our light is, indeed, darkness, and that darkness is great, and very criminal, and leads its deluded followers into "the valley of the shadow of death."

But, further, it was for the sake of us miserable sinners that Christ came into the world, and became subject to all its sorrows. For us he lived, for us he bled, for us he died. What then shall we do for him? Alas! all we have, we owe to his atonement, and happy are we, that, through him, we have found a ransom. But are we, then, to live without a rule? Shall the redeemed of the Lord convert his grace into the instrument of sin? God forbid! this is the mark of those, who are rebellious and ungrateful. Thus hardened, through their own depravity, they see no form, nor comeliness in the life of Christ, and receive no impression from his example. Whereas, the faithful Christian, overwhelmed with gratitude, and desirous to

express it, freely and gladly conforms to his divine original. For love naturally begets imitation, and spiritual love surpasses all other in this, that its object is altogether lovely, being no other than Jesus Christ, the pattern of all excellency, the manifestation of divine mercy. How strong, therefore, must be that love, which is thus impelled by gratitude, and how successful must be its endeavours to resemble so blest a pattern!

The Christian, then, has this superior advantage, that, as his end is incomparably the best, so the way that he has chosen, is the most perfect and secure. Though the road to heaven be a pilgrimage, and the path which he travels beset with danger, he has the light of Christ to direct him, and his steps to guide him in it: and whilst he follows these, he shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life. Christ, though he appeared in our nature, derived no contagion from it; though tempted as we are, yet he was without sin. Following him, therefore, we have no solicitude about the perfection of our pattern, all our concern is employed about our own faithful imitation of it. Should we be inclined to loiter on our
road,

road, one look to him urges us forward; should we go astray, his example warns us, and calls us back. Should we be surrounded with difficulties, we remember him, that "had not where to lay his head." Should we suffer the calamities of human life, we remember him, that was made perfect by suffering. And whilst we persevere, in the road which he hath appointed for us, this will be our great encouragement, "though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil;" we shall at length rest with him, and that rest will be glorious.

But, secondly, let us specify a few particular virtues of our Saviour's life, and shew, in what manner they should influence our practice. And though it may be difficult to select, from such a constellation of graces, it will be acknowledged, that none shine brighter than his piety and devotion. At the stated times he appeared in the temple, though its service was now soon to give way to a purer worship. Often did he retire from the multitude, and spent whole nights in prayer, and contemplation. This beloved of his Father was yet earnest in supplication, though legions of angels were ready to minister unto him,

him. Whatever petition he offered for himself, was yet offered in submission to his Father's will. Here, then, is a lesson to every member of the church of Christ, to pay the same regard to a more perfect worship, as he did, to a mere introductory dispensation: and it will teach us the presumption, and the wickedness, of those, who, through sloth, or a vain affectation of independence, refuse their attendance on the public service. Here is, also, a loud call to us to neglect no opportunities for solitary devotion: our own imperfections require it of us: our daily offences demand daily, and secret, acts of penitence, since he, who offended not, hath set us the example of fervency and continuance in prayer.

What ardent zeal did Christ display, for the glory of God, in promoting his kingdom, and reprovng its opposers! With what indignation did he scourge the traffickers of the earth out of the temple, who had changed the "house of prayer into a den of thieves." This should kindle, in every sincere follower of Christ, an abhorrence of presumptuous sins; when they hear his name profaned, and his worship vilified. Public and notorious offences

offences have no claim to lenity, but should be treated with greater severity, on that very account. Nor, if we regard the honour of our Lord, shall we be content with reproving only; but we shall encourage the willing, comfort the feeble-minded, and recommend the mild and peculiar virtues, which are essential to our calling, and shew our advancement in true religion. The one we shall do, in opposition to the scorner; the other, to the arrogant pretender, and disputer of this world.

The charity of our Lord is another part of his character, which justly claims our imitation. Need I mention particular instances? All the actions of his life are so many evidences of it. It was love to man, which brought him into this world: love supported him in all his trials; and forsook him not upon the cross. His love included the whole race of man, invited the worst of men to be reconciled to God, and extended its salutary influence to all the faithful, from the beginning, to the end of time. During his abode amongst us, his voice was the voice of kindness; and his power was exerted in behalf of every object of pity. He gave what he had to misery, and forgave the most atrocious offences

offences against himself. This very spirit, my brethren, is the spirit to which we are called. Though our love must fall infinitely short of his, in its glorious effects, yet love must still govern both our affections and our actions, or we cannot belong to him. If he so loved us, we ought also to love one another. What then shall we say of those, who are so lost to the sense of his transcendent love, that wrath, strife, seditions, and every species of malignity, still keep possession of their hearts, and prove that they are the very legitimate children of Satan, and not the sons of God!

But further, the forbearance and self-denial of Christ will be of great use, to wean us from sensual indulgences. You all know the labours of his life, and that he sought no relief from the work, which his Father gave him to do. A man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief, he received no alleviation from the comforts of the world. He silently trod the path of suffering: and, though he fasted, and afflicted his soul, it was for no sin of his, but for our sakes, that he became an illustrious example of self-denial. Can we possibly imagine, then, that we belong

to him, when we are attached to pleasure, and self-indulgence? He himself hath taught us another lesson. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." Behold then, O Christian! the terms, on which you have put on your armour. Christ calls you after him, but he calls you to outward and inward conflicts; nor does he give you the crown of life, till he has marked you for a faithful and laborious soldier.

The humility of our blessed Lord, is another of his virtues, which we are bound to imitate, but cannot equal. The glory which he had with the Father was before the worlds, but when he appeared amongst us, he was without form, or comeliness, and condescended to the lowest offices of kindness. This, too, was for our sakes, "Learn of me," says he, "for I am meek, and lowly of heart, and ye shall find rest to your souls." If the Lord wash the feet of his disciples, the disciples ought to wash one another's feet. Nothing can be more reasonable than this. For shall the Son of God humble himself? and shall man be elated with pride? Shall Jesus veil the real glories of his nature? and shall man assume

assume perfections, which are not his own? Shall the Lord of the creation make poverty his choice? and shall man glory in riches, and esteem them substantial goods? There is no view, in which pride appears so truly unreasonable, as in that glass, from which is reflected the humility of Christ. So that man has nothing left to glory in but the Lord, and this is sufficient for him.

Lastly, examine then, yourselves, my brethren, whether the rule, which you have followed, has been the perfect rule of Christ. For, the word of God is express, "He that saith he abideth in him, ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked." Here, then, is no room for self-opinion, or the sophistry of a deluded mind. The world has, indeed, established a system of morals, but the sublime virtues, and the finer duties, are generally omitted in that code. If, then, your guide be imperfect, you may attain, perhaps, reputation among men, but you will fail of the end—a conformity to the will of God. Even your faith in Christ will be of no avail, but as it stirs you up to an imitation of him. Your trust in his righteousness will be unsupported, unless that righteous mind be in you,

you, which was in him. Nor should you trust to a future conformity, or late repentance, since the life which you now live, is the living evidence and trial of your faith, and will probably determine, whether your last end will be like his.

My brethren, if you are not earnestly engaged in this work, your hearts will either be divided, or enslaved. If you are occupied in the service of another master, the example of Christ will have no other effect upon you, but to reproach you. Consider, then, the choice you have made, before it be too late to return. Here is a road, trodden by multitudes, paved with ease, and attended by pleasure, but strewn, by the tempter, with vanity and lies, and ending in the regions of despair and woe. And here is a path, left you by your great leader, blest by his example, supported by his grace, and which will bring you safe to the mansions of bliss. Surely you cannot hesitate a moment, which of these you shall prefer. Rise, then, in the strength of God; put on your spiritual armour; and enquire where are the footsteps of your beloved. Lay aside every weight, and the sin, which doth so easily beset you, that ye may
run,

run, with patience, the race that is set before you.

Many of you, doubtless, are resolved, and have made the best choice, and set your faces towards heaven. Trust not yourselves, then, without the direction of Christ; but, in every step, ask counsel of him, and lose not sight of his cheering light. Though you walk through the valley of tears, his consolations will be present with you: and should you be surrounded with dangers, take courage, he will support you. Safe under his protection, and drawn with the bands of everlasting love, he is your's, and you are his. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.

Now to God the Father, God the Son, &c.

SERMON VI.

CHRISTIAN FORGIVENESS.

LUKE vi. and part of the 37th verse.

Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven.

SUCH is the benign tendency of the gospel, that they who are most averse to it, have no reason to complain of its efficacy on the peace and happiness of the world. Whatever acts of malice and revenge disturb the repose of private life, whatever public animosities infest the world by war and cruelty, must be imputed entirely to the perverseness of carnal men. For the gospel of Christ is so far from encouraging the doing evil, that it disallows even the avenging it, and commands the clamorous calls of malice into harmony and silence. Amongst Christians, therefore, peace and mildness reign: though they live among lions, they retain the meekness of lambs; not paying one injury with

another, but striving to win their very enemies, by the mild discipline of their own affections.

Indeed, where mercy would not be mercy, it allows the penalties of justice. It allows of self-defence, lest the wicked should seize upon the heritage of God. Nor does it restrain men from applying to lawful judges, to heal the wrongs of injustice, and establish right, where it is notoriously subverted.

But the religion of Christ forbids all private revenge, and the enmity of the heart. In great injuries, it discountenances all malicious prosecutions; in smaller, the avenging them at all. Should the transgressor say, I repent, it inculcates pardon: towards the impenitent, it calls for charity. It admits of no severity, except where mercy would be cruelty. It allows of no exaction upon human infirmities, no taking the advantage of human indigence. Every man, from man may justly claim forgiveness: but the relenting sinner, the slight offender, the weak brother, the indigent debtor, have a peculiar and universal claim.

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I shall, therefore, in the following discourse, first, endeavour to set before you the reasonableness, and necessity, of this duty of forgiveness; and, secondly, the privilege annexed to it, — “*Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven.*”

And, first, let us consider, that we are all debtors to the Almighty, through sin; that, though creatures, we have not had the disposition of creatures before him; that we have forgotten him, times without number; that, when we have remembered him, we have sinned against conviction; that we have abused his mercy, trampled upon his forbearance, and increased the score by multiplied transgressions. Notwithstanding this, man hopes to be forgiven. How? Not by strict justice, but by mercy. Shall he then require strict justice from his fellow-creatures? No; let him shew to others that compassion, which he stands so much in need of himself. The evil servant in the gospel stands self-condemned, in that he had no sooner received a generous instance of forgiveness, than he hardened his heart against his fellow-servant. But this servant was cared for, by the common Lord of both, and his cause was avenged by

withholding that mercy from the other, which he would not shew.

This, then, is the proper effect, which the example of the divine mercy should have upon us,—“Be ye merciful, even as your Father, which is in heaven, is merciful.” That blessings are multiplied upon the unworthy; that sinners are borne with much long-suffering; that rebels are invited, and received to pardon, all this is owing to free and unmerited mercy. And whenever the soul of man is awakened to a sense of this mercy, it is struck with the profoundest love of its sovereign author. Immediately, a desire is formed to study its resemblance, and it will then be our delight, and joy, to shew mercy to our fellow-creatures. We shall then acknowledge his care and providence over all, and co-operate with it. Whereas, if men are blind to the divine goodness, they see nothing but gloominess in themselves, and in the whole creation. The devil, who has no hope, endeavours to avenge his misery upon the creatures of God. And they, who imitate him, as they have destroyed their own peace, so they endeavour to extend the ruin to others:

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the natural effect of which is, an unforgiving and malicious spirit.

But God calls us to forgiveness, not only by his own example, but by the pattern, which his blessed Son hath left us. We call ourselves disciples of the Prince of Peace: let us then remember, that as he preached forgiveness, so he practised it. Before we were willing to accept his love, he opened the way to our reconciliation. The miracles he performed, whilst he dwelt among us, were not only the seals of his mission, but the demonstrations of his love. That gentleness of spirit, which he taught, shone forth in all his actions, and reached even those obdurate wretches, that spurned at his bounty, and brought him to his cross. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," was his dying prayer. Whilst we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Shall the Lord of life and glory thus abase himself, to make the first advances of love to us; and shall we, who partake of his compassions, refuse to partake of his compassionate spirit? Miserable creatures! is this the return we make to the Lord of life and glory?

Moreover, the spirit of the gospel speaks the same language with the example of its author. For, indeed, if Christ be formed in us, our will will be the same with his; our love to him will be seen in our love to others. Christ, as he unites us to himself, so to one another. But since all Christians have not the christian spirit; since the best are compassed with infirmities, charity and forgiveness become requisite duties, to preserve the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. These graces of the gospel the true believer cannot be without; they are congenial to his soul, and declare from whence he receives his renewed disposition. Endued with these, his prayers are winged with a divine fervour, and carry intercessions for friends, for enemies, for all. When he partakes in the Lord's supper, they banish every contracted thought, and expand his soul to some resemblance of that love, he there commemorates. By means of these, the body of Christ flourishes and increases, more and more. They not only heal the wounds of malice, but render christian love durable and lasting. They are therefore duties, which, members of the same body may justly claim from each other: and if they are practised, out of a regard to Christ,

Christ, he will esteem them as done to him, since they are done to those, whom he calls his brethren.

The forgiveness of injuries is the badge of our profession, a new commandment reserved for the Son of God to teach. Beneyolence was before confined within a narrow compass. The philosophers, indeed, whose notions were the most refined, affected to disregard injuries, and called in the aid of pride and insensibility, to enable them to do it. The Christian religion inculcates the duty, on the principle of meekness, and divine faith. "Our conversation is in heaven," says St. Paul. Let those, then, who have never been enlightened, who have no interest in the divine promises, nor tasted that the Lord is gracious, cherish and satisfy, if they can, the revenge and ambition of their souls. The true spirit of the gospel softens the men of savage minds: endued with this, the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid. This visibly appeared in the disposition of the first disciples, and will still appear in those, who are in reality what they profess to be.

Happy and benign spirit, that fills every true believer, and makes him a blessing on the earth! So amiable is its tendency, that it must appear beautiful to the eye of every discerning mind, and be approved even by those, who cannot feel it. It is this spirit, which supports that peace, which remains amongst men; and, if all were actuated by this lovely temper, the kingdom of Christ would be truly come. Charity would then shine forth in all its beauty, since there would be nothing to impede its beaming lustre, and the extent of it would be unbounded, and universal. Happiness would be the constant attendant of triumphant virtue, in this life, and the image of future glory, in the life to come. But whatever are the aims and pursuits of contentious mortals, the true follower of Christ transfers into his own mind a portion of that peace, which dwells in heaven. And as no malignant spirit durst approach that blissful place, no tumults can reach it, no violence disturb it, so it has the privilege here of fortifying its possessor against the outrageous passions of others, and enables him to fight the good fight he is called to, with magnanimity and perseverance. And though it be insufficient to calm all the storms of life,
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yet it carries him securely through the roughest and most dangerous passage, till he arrives at the haven of true repose.

But, secondly, I proceed to consider the reward annexed by our Saviour to this duty, "Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven." There is something in the nature of forgiveness, which implies mercy; but mercy excludes merit; it excludes boasting; and therefore the promise is to be taken in consistence with the whole plan of redemption, which is founded in mercy. However, this is the appointed condition of our forgiveness, without which, we have no reason to expect it, nor indeed are capable of receiving it. Our Blessed Lord, knowing the disposition of man, to claim what he has no right to expect, lays a particular stress upon it, lest any should deceive themselves with groundless hopes and dreams of salvation. "When ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any; that your Father also, which is in heaven, may forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father, which is in heaven, forgive your trespasses." Since we are, *then*, obnoxious to justice, not the objects of mercy; prepared by our malevolence
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for the place of torment, not for the regions of peace and love.

This, then, is the proper evidence of our faith, and our interest in his love, that in lieu of the immense debt he hath given us, we freely remit, for his sake, the offences of our fellow-creatures. And, surely, a luminous evidence it is; since we hereby testify our love to God, by submitting to his will; and our love to our fellow-creatures, by shewing it, not only to those, who return our kindness, but to the injurious, and to enemies. It shews the subjection of self, in overcoming the repugnancies of selfish nature, and a victory over our passions, in silencing the most clamorous—revenge. It enlarges our charity to its utmost extent, and makes us like unto God, in a restoration of his image. Here, then, is the ground of every passive, nay, of every active virtue: and the religion of Christ becomes, what it ought to be, the religion of the cross, the Christian's glory, the foundation of his hope, and his crown of joy.

Happy is it for us, that, upon any terms, especially by such benevolent means as these, we secure our blissful inheritance. But after all,

all, we must give God the praise, both for enabling us to forgive, and rewarding us for it. For if, through his spirit, we are endued with the grace, we may esteem it a certain pledge, that, through his merits, we shall receive the reward too. And, indeed, if we, frail and imperfect as we are, can forgive others, what may we not hope from God, the author of every good gift, and the liberal bestower of all happiness? Yet, what but infinite goodness would recompence the inequality of such disproportionate love? We forgive, at the most, a few temporal ills, perhaps only a disparaging word, or an imaginary affront. Whereas, in God's book, there is blotted out the rebellion of our wills against our Maker, the corruption of our appetites, ingratitude to that providence that sustains us, the apostacy of our whole nature from an infinite good. How can we sufficiently admire the inexhaustible compassion of our heavenly Father, who, upon our forgiving our brethren their comparatively small offences, grants, through the merits and intercession of Christ, a free pardon of our manifold transgressions? A happy occasion is hereby afforded us, from the evils of life, to look forward to our inheritance, and from the ill-usage we meet

meet with, from our fellow-creatures, to lay a firmer hold upon the divine mercy, and strengthen our interest in the Redeemer. Oh, then, what pity is it, that revenge should be so sweet to the disordered appetite, as to deprive us of the greatest of blessings, peace and reconciliation with our heavenly Father! What incurable perverseness does it shew, that heaven should appear so worthless in our eyes, that we will not sacrifice our sinful affections, in order to attain it; but madly throw the precious pearl away, the loss of which, the whole world is unable to compensate!

Do you, then, my brethren, as many of you as are disposed for christian virtue, keep the glorious things of salvation in your view, that you may rise superior to the obstructions of this vain world. That you may be able to run with patience the race that is set before you, look unto Jesus, who now enjoys the reward of his labours, whom no injuries or persecutions could deter from drinking his bitter cup. The same cup is appointed for you to drink, that you may be conformed to his image. Should your conflicts be great, the same Jesus is at hand to support you; and, when

when they are ended, he is ready to receive your souls. Yet a little while, and "he that shall come, will come, and will not tarry." And then the malice of evil men, though it should not be extinguished, will lose its power to hurt you. Your patience, having had its perfect trial, will be crowned, and your poverty of spirit will be made rich indeed. Saints and angels will then be your companions and friends, amidst whose blest society love will reign, and increase each other's bliss, by the united songs of gratitude and praise.

"Put on, therefore, (as the elect of God, holy and beloved) bowels of mercy, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any, even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye." Let not Satan, by inspiring you with the same spirit, by which he fell, beguile you to fall like him. Let not the world, by sinful customs, by false principles of honour, pervert you from truly honourable and christian heroism. Let not your enemies rise up against you, by pleading that you returned evil for evil, and became like them. But commit your cause to the righteous Judge of all,

all, who will shortly take the matter into his hand, and recompense both good and evil. "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing, thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head." Finally, brethren, have peace with all men, and the God of peace shall be with you.

That you may receive him with all your heart, and all your soul, and that he may dwell with you for ever, may God of his infinite mercy grant, through Jesus Christ our Lord!

To whom, with the Father, and the Holy Ghost, be all praise, majesty, and dominion, ascribed, now, and for evermore.

SERMON VII.

THE PRIVILEGES OF CHRISTIANS.

HEBREWS xii. 22, 23, 24.

But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels; to the general assembly, and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect; and to Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things, than that of Abel.

IF the former part of this epistle should appear obscure to the unlearned, or inattentive; or, if it should seem to be not entirely so interesting to us, as it was to the Hebrews of old, who, being prejudiced in favour of the Jewish law, wanted a full and peculiar display

display of the inferiority of that law to the christian dispensation, with respect to its author, its priesthood, its sacrifices, its institutions, its sanctions, and its end; yet, the very sublime, and animated manner, in which the superiority of the œconomy of grace is here unfolded, and the persuasive description of its glorious promises, at the same time that they point out the pen of the eloquent apostle, demand the attention of every member of the church of Christ, to the remotest ages.

They demand your attention, in particular, my brethren, who have, from your infancy, been admitted into this church, and have often heard its blessings recounted. They demand more than your attention; they require the first place in your esteem. They call loudly upon you to reject every allure-ment, that would rob you of their attainment. The empire of sin hath, through Christ, received a mortal blow. . The days of spiritual bondage are no more: all servile, as well as burthenome observances, are superseded, by the introduction of the gospel covenant. Christians are now formed into one privileged body, knit together by spiritual bonds, claiming an alliance with heaven, and gradually
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ripening to perfection. In consequence of this relation, they receive an actual relish of present comforts, and a foretaste of still greater to come. And they, who still refuse it, are, nevertheless, invited, commanded, entreated, to take the christian yoke upon them, with a promise, not only of pardon, but of the most exalted blessings. Since only to mention these is to recommend them, it cannot be unsuitable to endeavour to display them, as they are here enumerated by the apostle, who felt their divinest energy.

"Ye are come," says he, "to mount Sion." Christians are not invited to that place, from whence the law was delivered, the mount, which burned with flaming fire, and which was surrounded with many visible marks of terror, in order to denote God's indignation against every contemner of his law; but, they are actually approached to Sion, which signifies, in the language of the prophets, the place, from which the gracious sound of the Gospel was to be sent forth into all lands. They have heard that gracious voice, which proclaims pardon to transgression, and embraced that mercy, which it offers. So that they are admitted to the

spiritual privileges of the Gospel, which supply the imperfections of the law, and convert it into the law of love. It is the Gospel, and that alone, which makes a provision for unconstrained obedience. It is the glory of true believers, to bow before that King, who reigns in Sion, who rules his willing converts with the sceptre of love, and repays their services with freedom, dignity, and glory.

These privileges are introductory to a place in the "new Jerusalem, the city of the living God," so called, in opposition to the earthly, which belonged only to the Jewish polity, and has long ceased to be the place of divine regard, and the residence of his peculiar people. Whereas, the heavenly city hath eternal foundations, laid by God himself, and is the seat of his glorious presence. Into these mansions is Christ, our forerunner, entered, even he, who liveth and was dead—who, by his death, hath purchased life for us, and hath taken possession of an inheritance that cannot fail, reserved in store for all, whether Jews or Gentiles, who betake themselves to his fold, and wait with patience for his second coming. This is that new heaven, described by the Apostle, in his glorious

glorious vision, when he saw the ^{holy} city, coming down from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard, ^{it} says he, "a great voice out of heaven, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away. And he that sits upon the throne, said, Behold, I make all things new." But they, who are entitled to be the denizens of that city, whose builder and maker is God, are entitled likewise to participate with the heavenly society, which is there established. A communication between heaven and earth is one of the happy fruits of the Messiah's reign. His birth was solemnized by myriads of the heavenly host, celebrating, in songs of praise, the peace and harmony which were then to be restored. Active instruments in promoting the prosperity of his kingdom, the company of angels stand before his throne, ready to execute his will, and are sent by him to supply the wants of the redeemed.

Happy, then, are you, O ye sincere disciples of Christ, in the service of such glorious ministers. By their vigilance, the devices of Satan are resisted, and counteracted, and the dangers that threaten you are often averted. By the command of the Most High, they watch about your bed. They protect the envied innocence of the smiling babe; they contribute to the repose of the aged, and infirm, soldier of Jesus Christ. In the silent hour of meditation, they assist the prayers of pious votaries, and present them, in a golden censer, before God. In the assemblies of the faithful, they are present; they fill the vacant seats; they are held forth as examples of active virtue; and, by their unwearied assiduity, animate the zeal of every devout worshipper. And as Christians are thus joined with them in communion here, they will hereafter be fellow-citizens with them, in the regions above. They will be equal to them there; they will join in their songs of praise; they will be invested with the honour of performing a part, in their glorious labours.

In the mean time, that they may be prepared for a residence in that blissful place, they are admitted here to the privileges of

the christian church, called by the Apostle, "the general assembly, and church, of the first-born; whose names are written in heaven." The Jews, indeed, were originally privileged — for a long season, they, only, had a place in the church of God. But they lost their birth-right, through unbelief, which was conferred upon the spiritual Israel. All those who are united to Christ, their head, outwardly, by baptism, inwardly, by his spirit, obtain this inheritance, with privileges as ample as if they had an original claim. So long as they continue the real members of his body, they derive virtue from him, who worketh all in all. But, through this, as they communicate with the Host of heaven, so they are incorporated with their fellow-members, of the church militant, on earth. Here, they fight under one banner, they depend upon one common Lord. They have the same enemies to encounter, the same conflicts to endure, the same road to travel. Their ordinances are likewise common; the same table of love is spread for all. From hence are derived the bands of undissembled charity, engaging them to contribute to each other's wants, to animate one another in the christian warfare, to intercede for their brethren,

thren, and pour out their hearts in supplication, divested of malice, in all its forms, and overflowing with universal love. Let me add, that their inheritance is the same. They are made free denizens of heaven by virtue of Christ, their head; and, as their names are, through him, enrolled in the charter of immortality, when these earthly relations are dissolved, they shall receive a crown of life.

They shall receive it from the hands of that God, who is the judge of all, both Jews and Gentiles, from whose sentence there lies no appeal. But this sentence true Christians have no reason to dread, for God himself has engaged to be their Father, and their friend. By virtue of the covenant of life, he is himself their exceeding great reward. By enjoying him, they enjoy a pledge of their acceptance with him, and a security that it shall never fail. Be not afraid, then, O ye sincere, though imperfect Christians, to meet your God. Tremble not at his appearance, when he sits upon the throne. He is a consuming fire only to the workers of iniquity. He will judge you by that man, whom he hath ordained; who knows your infirmities; who hath taken away sin, the sting of death, and wrought

wrought out for you a victory complete. So that, after having received your absolving sentence, you will be admitted into the presence of your judge, from whence doubts, and fears, will be for ever banished.

There is the residence of the spirits of just men made perfect. What kind of communication there is between those, who have accomplished their warfare, and wait for their complete reward, and the members of the church militant, is not easy to determine. But as they belong to the same body, they form one grand society; and, consequently, are interested in the welfare of those they have left behind them. Accordingly, they are represented, by the Apostle, as a cloud of witnesses, that having arrived, themselves, at the goal, are spectators of the race of others, and held forth to those, that contend, as examples of faith and patience. Their's is the place of security, our's of trouble and of danger. Thrice happy souls, your pastures are placed more nearly to the beams of the sun of righteousness than our's, and more abundantly refreshed by the fountain of living waters. But we remember, that our toils were once your's, and your bliss is now greater.

in proportion to your former hazards. In the race, which you have run, we are encouraged to persevere, because you have persevered, and have conquered; and when we shall take possession of the same glories with you, what a rapturous scene will then appear, when the communion with each other, which was begun here, will there be completed, and the happy spirits shall meet the victorious soldiers of Christ with the sincerest congratulations. Then shall they be "one fold, under one shepherd," in which the enjoyments will be unenvied, and the love without alloy.

The author of these privileges is Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant. For, the old covenant being, by transgression, dissolved, a mediator became necessary, that should restore peace between God and man. In his name, the offers of pardon are made; the promises of God, to sinful creatures, are connected with his atonement; and, from him, they receive their end and completion. As a divine person, he is able to sustain this covenant of grace, and give it its full effect. As one like unto us, he was made capable of bearing our sins, and suffering the penalty
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which justice demanded. It is the glory, then, of the christian profession, that we can come to him, who hath borne our sorrows—that we are invited to him, who intercedes in the presence of God for us. It is Christ the Mediator, through whom the weak are supported, the weary are refreshed, the falling are recovered, and blessings are derived from God upon all his creatures. Through him, our poor endeavours are accepted, and we ourselves obtain a place, and a name, in the mansions of immortality, where God himself will behold us with complacency, and continue to bless us in Christ Jesus.

This covenant was ratified by the shedding of blood, and therefore, the Apostle adds, “and to the sprinkling of blood, which speaketh better things than that of Abel.” As, in the jewish law, the people were sprinkled with the blood of the sacrifices, shed to confirm the covenant between God and them; so, in the dispensation of the Gospel, it is the voice of this blood, that pleads with man, in the name of God, to enter into the bonds of the covenant of peace—It is this voice that pleads, and pleads effectually, before God's throne, in behalf of man, that since
justice

justice is satisfied, mercy may be shewn. Of far more gracious efficacy this, than the blood of Abel, which cried only for vengeance, and still speaks in the punishment of him that shed it, as a warning to the injurious, to persecutors, to murderers. But, alas! the sins of men are themselves too grievous to want accusers, too heinous for any other plea but that of mercy.

Thus have I endeavoured to set before you a description of the Christian Church, a society whose privileges are so transcendent, that they make the honours and glories of the earth shrink into nothing. A just sense of these privileges gives a dignity to the meanest station; if you are poor, it makes you rich; if you are despised, it makes you honourable. If you are surrounded with the evil company of the world, the company, to which you belong, makes you superior to the infection. Dignified with the blessings, to which you are entitled, you cannot prostitute your whole labours for the meat that perisheth—you are incited, and enabled, to labour for that which endureth to everlasting life. Learn, then, my brethren, to reverence your calling; study to excel, and grow in grace; and cherish the
noble

noble ambition of being, more and more, fitted for your inheritance.

But beware, lest the prospect of the exalted bliss, to which you are called, should fill you with an invidious contempt of others, or a disregard to just authority, or a forgetfulness of your proper station. Beware of a conceited, perverse, and schismatical, spirit.—Pride, especially spiritual pride, was not made for man. Schism tears in sunder that body, which is one, one in spirit, one in love. Through pride, Satan lost his throne; through pride, and schism, man loses heaven, and resembles the prince of darkness. The christian road to life, and immortality, lies through humility, obedience, and all those lowly virtues, which Christ came to exemplify, and to teach. The very greatness of your privileges should make you rejoice, with trembling, and the abundant stores of mercy, which are poured down upon you, should make you fear, lest you fail in your return for so much goodness.

Have you, then, experienced its effects, in enlarging and ennobling your desires? Should any of you be content with the mere name
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of disciples, and look no further than the external forms of religion, consider, I beseech you, the vanity of a profession, and a name. Was it for this, that God, in the expressive language of scripture, "hath shaken not only the earth, but also heaven?" Was it for this, that the blood of Jesus was shed; that he arose; that he ascended into heaven; that the Holy Spirit was poured forth? Was it for this, that the Gospel was preached in all lands, and still sounds in your ears? Does heaven open its everlasting doors to extort from you no gratitude, no preparation, for its enjoyments? If you, then, hope for immortal life, embrace the unmerited purchase, with love unfeigned, and obedience, that flows from a lively, active, and devoted, heart. For be assured, that God, as he hath begun, will likewise finish, and manifest his glorious arm, both in rewarding his faithful servants, and condemning those, who reject his mercy.

"See," then, "that ye refuse not him that speaketh." The master is come, and he calls with a voice from heaven. He intreats; he warns; he commands; he hath prepared the marriage feast; he hath sent his messengers to invite the guests. All the powers of love, of gratitude,

gratitude, of mercy, are combined. The whole theatre of heaven and earth, waits with anxious expectation. The grave devours; God, the Judge, standeth before the door; Satan is ready to accuse; heaven and hell are prepared to receive their inhabitants; and a long eternity closes the probationary scenes. Can any thing be added to interest you more? Look, then, to yourselves: for, how shall you escape, if you neglect so great salvation? And, oh! if you do not escape, the very offers of such salvation will make you more guilty for rejecting it, and augment your future pains. Now, then, while the day of salvation lasts, turn your footsteps into the way of peace—**kiss the Son, and take an everlasting refuge in the bosom of your God.**

Particularly to observe the different portions of virtue and vice, the one and the other, contributes greatly to our education. To behold the righteous man rewarded with manifold blessings, and flourishing as his years decay—the wicked, on the contrary, visibly attended with that misery and travail, which is caused by sin—is surely a most prevailing motive to decline from the road, on which multitudes perish, and pursue the course, which is the way of life.

SERMON VIII.

THE RIGHTEOUS NEVER FORSAKEN.

PSALM xxxvii. 25.

*I have been young and now am old; yet have I
not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed
begging bread.*

TO mark the various issues of Providence, and the dealings of God towards the children of men, is no small part of our duty. Particularly to observe the different portions of virtue and vice, in these transitory scenes of life, contributes greatly to our edification. To behold the righteous man rewarded with manifold blessings, and flourishing as his years decay—the wicked, on the contrary, visibly attended with that misery and travail, which is caused by sin—is surely a most prevailing motive to decline from the road, on which multitudes perish, and pursue the course, which abounds with solid complacencies. This is the
use,

use, which the Psalmist makes of his own experiences; and this he recommends to others, in various exhortations. "Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. Delight thyself also in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. The Lord knoweth the days of the upright, and their inheritance shall be for ever. They shall not be ashamed in the evil time, and in the days of famine they shall be satisfied. For such as are blessed of him, shall inherit the earth; and they that are cursed of him, shall be cut off. Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace." By such observations as these, a wise and good man makes every occurrence contribute to his improvement, so that the vigour of his faith and piety will increase with his years, and his old age will become truly venerable, and fraught with exemplary wisdom.

Indeed, the mind of man must be prepared for this wisdom, before he can be enriched by it. A worldly spirit confines all its wisdom within the limits of its own practice; and therefore can receive no improvement from the

the views of divine Providence. The designs and actions of a vicious man flow from a troubled fountain, and are employed in the service of his lusts. How then can the peace of a righteous man seem lovely, or his lot desirable, to *him*, whose happiness is placed in the most opposite pursuits, and who, through sinful habits, is deprived, not only of the freedom of acting, but the power of seeing and judging aright. Worldly maxims alone are his rule of action: therefore he follows the track, which the world has made; he knows no other service, than that of mammon—no other bliss, than what the sensual appetite affords. The virtues of the gospel are only an obstruction to his views; and the portion, which religion gives, is too mean for his ambition. Contracted views! vain ambition! not to be envied by the meanest, but to be pitied by the truly wise, and the more to be pitied in proportion to his success. The pious Christian has desires of a more glorious nature, and yet is satisfied with his present portion. His prospects are bounded only by eternity, yet, during his journey thither, he is not forsaken; though a pilgrim, he wanders not for bread. Amidst an inhospitable world, he finds entertainment, and is protected by his

his God. Far be it from him to set up his dwelling here; He requires but a competency to support his journey, and conduct him to heaven. It shall be the business of the following discourse, first, to confirm the doctrine of the text; and, secondly, to deduce some inferences from it, which may contribute to our edification.

And, first, though the privileges of the gospel charter chiefly relate to the spiritual kingdom of the Messiah, as it was for these particularly his blood was shed, yet so precious was the offering that was then made, that there is no blessing either in the heavens above, or in the earth beneath, that it is not available to purchase. All things are together with Christ conveyed to the true believer. Time and eternity are his. But what is time? what is this world compared to an eternal duration? It cannot be that God will deny so small a boon to those, to whom he has already given a name in his own family and kingdom. Agreeably to which, we have this assurance, "that godliness is profitable for all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come;" and this further encouragement, "Seek ye

first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." Shall we then distrust his word? Upon whom can we rely with so much confidence, as upon a God ever present, omniscient, almighty, a Father that careth for us, a Redeemer, that once died, and ever liveth to make intercession for us? Whilst, then, the faith of man is deceitful, and all worldly tenures uncertain, this full assurance remains, that God will withhold no good thing from them, that live a godly life.

Indeed, the very nature and tendency of godliness is in harmony with the divine promises. A good man is blessed with a single eye, and therefore no dark designs betray him into anxiety and danger. He walks openly as in the day, and consequently is able to discern his best and truest interest. He maintains a regularity of affections, and acts with chearfulness, constancy, and resolution. He proceeds, in the business of life, with an uniform tenor, because he is not distracted by a variety of enterprises and designs. Having no unjustifiable ambition himself, he stands not in the way of the ambitious. An enemy to no man, he provokes none to be at enmity

with him. He seeks no injurious rights from others; and invites not injuries from them. A friend to all, he claims the friendship of all; and however he is regarded by the envious and malicious; will receive the assistance and support of the truly good. Thus does the integrity of the upright guide him in the way, and the health and well-being of his soul, by a friendly influence, promotes his outward prosperity. But as no troubles wilfully incurred destroy the harmony of his life, so no irregular lusts consume his living. Industry empowers him to maintain the store, which God has given him; and frugality, to lay up perhaps something for the pledges of God's love, the children which he hath given him, for the sick and needy, the orphan and the widow. Temperance confines his wants within the compass of nature; and frugality enables him to satisfy them with ease and comfort. From the exercise of both arises true contentment with thanksgiving. For, enjoying his portion as the citizen of another land, he may safely rejoice in his present inheritance, and esteem it as an earnest of the completion of his happiness.

But as it is from God that blessings flow, that industry and labour are crowned with success, it is the privilege of the righteous man to make God his friend, to offer up his soul and body a living sacrifice, through Christ, to the preserver of both, and commend his way and his work to him by continual prayer. The divine faithfulness engages him to hope for a blessing, and the divine goodness enables him to experience it. And though he should not be blessed in a manner suitable to his own wishes; nay, though earthly blessings should be denied, he acknowledges the goodness of his God even in this: assured that what is best will be bestowed, and that though he knows not what to pray for as he ought, the heavenly Father both knows and wills the happiness of his children. And even in the worst extremity, this promise still remains, "The Lord will preserve him, and keep him alive, and he *shall* be blessed upon the earth; and thou wilt not deliver him into the will of his enemies. The Lord will preserve him upon the bed of languishing; thou wilt make all his bed in his sickness."

Indeed, the Lord has ordained the whole inferior creation to administer to the righteous man's

man's good. He makes the very brute creatures the instruments of praise. He reads a lesson of his duty in *their* obedience; he uses them with blessing, and enjoys them with peace. The inanimate creation contributes to his felicity, either in affording supplies for the refreshment of the body, or to the soul for exalted contemplation. It withholds not from him the utmost it can give. On the contrary, the evils which the wicked bring upon themselves, arise from the very goods, which they abuse, the abundance of which only serves to inflame their cruelty, luxury, and pride. Even the light of the sun is no joy to them, whose ways are dark: nor would the utmost liberality of Providence relieve the wants of those, who deprive themselves of the possibility of enjoyment. The luxuriant bounties, then, which are poured from the hand of heaven, are a real blessing only to the righteous. The same gale, which wafts the pious to the shores of bliss, drives the wicked upon the rocks of their own presumption.

If, then, the goodness of God hath so constituted the world, that his children only are capable of enjoying natural good with satisfac-

tion, will not the same goodness appoint a particular distribution of it to their comfort? Can we imagine that those things, which are naturally good, but become the cause of ill to some through their own perverseness, should not as well be directed, by their gracious Author, to fulfil their primitive intent in promoting the happiness of the good, as to increase the guilt and misery of the bad? Happiness is the end of our creation: will not the Creator, therefore, bestow happiness in a manner suitable to his own liberality? Will he not dispense to us every good thing in such measure, as is expedient for us to receive?

The wisdom of God is also displayed in blessing the righteous, in order to manifest his care and superintendency over them, God, to shew that he delights in goodness, hath made it the road to prosperity and happiness. No encouragement, then, is wanting to a good man, to persevere in the path of duty. Nothing but our own passions can induce us to deviate from it. Nothing can make this path seem rugged and uneasy, but that yoke of sin, which incapacitates us for every pure enjoyment. But having tasted how gracious the Lord is, we have a powerful

ful inducement to "grow in grace," that we may receive still more precious gifts. Having obtained an earnest of his loving-kindness, what can make us despair of his everlasting help? Whereas, if the family of the wicked only prospered, where would be the manifestation of God's moral government and providence? The righteous man would then be unable to support his virtue without a miracle, and sink under despair. When he saw there was no comforter in this vale of misery, where could he disburthen his griefs, or fly for succour under his pressing calamities? The children of this world would then pursue their interest with unwearied labour and success. The ambitious man, and the covetous oppressor, would be encouraged to reap the spoils of innocence, without fear of retribution, and the world itself would be made a scene of confusion and disaster.

But further, the righteous man may not only expect the gracious workings of Providence, on his own behalf: his children also are under the same protection. The blessings of the Almighty proceed from an inexhaustible fountain, and keep pace with the succession of many generations. Accordingly, he

proclaims himself the father of the fatherless, and the husband of the widow. "Leave thy fatherless children," says he, "I will preserve them alive, and let thy widows trust in me." Death makes no breaches in the covenant of our God: so that we often see peculiar marks of his favour long to continue in the same pious and happy family. Besides, the good name of parents is often a portion to their children; a precious ointment, that not only embalms the dead, but whose favour descends to posterity, and recommends their offspring. Nor is it improbable, that, as in pious Timothy, the care of faithful parents should, by the grace of God, influence their descendants; so that by following them, as they followed Christ, *they* also may be entitled to the same blessings and rewards.

Thus have I endeavoured to set before you, the advantage of religion even in this life. Let it, however, be remembered, that all worldly blessings are given in subordination to spiritual treasures; and that God deprives his children of them, when they are found inconsistent with superior goods. In public calamities also, one lot befalls the righteous and the wicked; but those very misfortunes, which

which prove a curse to the one, increase the faith, and improve the virtues of the other. In times of persecution, the righteous indeed suffer, but are not forsaken. If, when tried, they are found faithful unto death, they then obtain a "more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

But, secondly, from the foregoing considerations, we may learn to reprove the children of this world. For, there is no strength, nor wisdom, nor counsel, against the Lord. What, then, though they prosper? their prosperity is unblest, their labours lost, their enjoyments satisfy them not; they live without comfort, and die without hope. How vain, then, is man, when he is alienated from God, and unsupported! How doubly wretched, when he sets himself in opposition to his Lord! "Why boastest thou thyself, that thou canst do mischief? whereas the goodness of God endureth yet daily."—That goodness will order the whole creation, according to the rules of equity, and watch over the righteous as its peculiar charge. "Therefore shall God destroy thee for ever: he shall take thee, and pluck thee out of thy dwelling, and root thee out of the land of the living."

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Hence, also, we may learn to silence the tongues of the murmurers, and discontented. For, the blessings of the righteous never fail : and, if the wicked suffer, it is owing to themselves. Why, then, do they increase the bitterness of woe ? Why cherish the plague of a distempered soul ? Why do they aggravate their misery, by their sins ? It is the hand of God, O ye sinners ! and therefore be dumb. Accuse not Providence, but search, and examine, yourselves. Are you indeed hardly dealt with, as ye pretend ? Your very murmuring is a proof that you are not. You are chastised, not humbled : you are punished for your offences, but you are still rebellious.

From this protection of heaven, over the good and pious, arises an inexhaustible fund of consolation to them. "For the Lord is their shepherd ; they shall not want. He will satisfy their souls in drought, and feed them in the pasture which he hath blessed. He will plant an hedge about it, and guard it from secret ambush, or open violence." There, amidst the tumults and calamities of the world, they rest securely. Should they be involved in outward trouble, they enjoy inward peace. Amidst an adverse world,

world, the friendship of their Maker still remains—in the midst of darkness, the Lord will be a light unto them. Art thou, then, O pious Christian, by some peculiar contingency, beset with poverty and scarcity, or burdened by a numerous family, whose infant years render them unable to contribute to their support? Remember the young ravens, that call upon God, If he cares for these, how much more for the children of his adopted family? He that gives thee the bread of life, will give thee also food and raiment. Know, then, thy privileges; use thy comforts; continue in thy own duty; and be careful for nothing; but, in every thing, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.

Hence, likewise, spring true content and satisfaction. A good man will not envy the prosperous sinner, because he ranges in a wider field. He experiences the divine favour towards himself, and enjoys superior happiness. His little is far greater than the worldling's heaps. He looks backward, and his labours have not been defiled with guilt; forward, and his stores will descend, with a blessing, to his posterity. When he lies upon the

the bed of sickness, how must it cheer his drooping spirits, to consider, that his children will be left in the hands of an indulgent Father, who knows their wants, and, rather than his promise should fail, will raise up plenty from the barren sand.

Lastly, let the gracious overflowings of God's bounty increase our gratitude and love. He might have brought us to the place of rest, through a desolate wilderness, unblest by one ray of comfort. But, behold, the Redeemer hath enlightened this valley of tears, and furnished provision therein to satisfy all his followers, daily feeding unnumbered multitudes, and yet there are fragments to spare, an equal plenty to those that come after. Have we, then, my brethren, hearts, in return, touched with gratitude? Oh! let his unmerited love, to our souls and bodies, engage us to give both souls and bodies to him, and thereby prove our faith, and declare that we are the Lord's. Let all, whose stores increase, increase also, themselves, in devotion, in meekness, in charity, in benevolence, and in all the fruits of the Spirit. Let all our blessings engage us to thirst after him, who is the fountain of blessing and enjoyment.

ment. So that, when we leave our earthly portions, we may exchange them for heavenly treasures, and sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God.

I shall conclude, with the words of the Apostle. "He that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips, that he speak no guile. Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it. For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayers; but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil. And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good? But if ye suffer for righteousness sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled: but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts,"

Now to God the Father, &c.

SERMON IX.

DISCONTENT CENSURED.

LAMENTATIONS iii. 39.

*Wherefore doth a living man complain; a man,
for the punishment of his sins?*

IT is more easy, my brethren, to understand the purport of this exhortation, than to acknowledge the justice of it; more easy to own its justice, than to prepare the heart for that submission, to the afflicting hand of God, which it so forcibly enjoins. For, is it not obvious to complain? What is this, but to use the expressive language which Nature teaches, when oppressed with woes? Accordingly, the prophet himself, whose words you have heard, laments, in the most moving strains, his own, and his country's calamities. But then, grace sanctifies these lamentations, and checks them, when too importunate. It is

is this, which turns the eyes of men from the sufferings themselves to the cause of those sufferings; from the immediate instruments, that inflict the wound, to that just, and merciful, and all-directing agent, who either commands, or permits, it. Accordingly, Jerusalem, who pours forth her complaints, in the bitterness of soul, against her destroyers, is constrained to confess, "The Lord is righteous, for I have rebelled against his commandments." It is, however, but too visible, that punishment often produces enmity, instead of submission; and complaints, instead of confession of sins. From hence arise the execrations of the poor, the impatience of the disappointed, the factious despondency of the unsuccessful, and the discontent and murmurings of the afflicted. Offences these, which are no less frequent, than they are provoking to the divine Majesty.

It shall, therefore, be the business of this discourse, to display, first, their folly; and, secondly, their guilt.

And, first, it is plain, to the most superficial observer, that God is a moral governor of the world; for he has annexed certain rewards

wards to some actions, and punishments to others. What these, in general, are, men know by their own experience, and the testimony of the whole world. As man is a sinful creature, and strongly attached, by his passions, to sinful indulgences, God has not only placed before his eyes, but permits him to feel, the ruinous effects of his own vice and folly. And as sin appears in a great variety of forms, so does punishment. Man sometimes reads his transgression by the chastisement it has occasioned, and then his own iniquities correct him: at other times, he suffers from the immediate hand of God, or the instrumentality of man, such unexpected evils, as blast the most promising expectations, and embitter every human joy. This entirely corresponds with the general plan of divine government, that rebellion against God deserves, and occasions, his displeasure. Shall mortal man, then, be more just than God, when he enters into judgment with him? Shall he complain, if he suffers what his sins deserve? He complains of the constitution of things; he would reverse the very nature of good and evil; and his folly is as conspicuous, as if he pretended to change the ordinances of

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the sun and moon, or direct the motions of the universe.

This, as it is a great, so it is a pernicious folly. God is angry with us, and we receive chastisement. We complain, and his anger is not abated. As our sufferings increase, so do our complaints. In the mean time, habits of indignant fretfulness are formed within us. We become more angry with our Maker, and he punishes us still more for our iniquities. Thus, man becomes his own tormentor. The very remedy, which his folly and impatience dictate, makes his disease incurable.

But, secondly, that we survive the afflicting hand of God, is an instance of his mercy. Death is the proper penalty of sin. The soul that sinneth, it shall die. Our life is, then, the last stake we have to offer. As soon as this forfeiture is paid by the impenitent, the man is insolvent, and still remains a debtor: he is then consigned to the prison, from whence there is no release. Behold here the justice of God. But till that awful period arrives, man remains a monument of mercy. What, then, though he be chastened for his offences? yet he is chastened on the

theatre of life. Perhaps, his sins have been great and numberless. He has been warned before, and yet is spared. Shall he, then, complain of the chastisement of God, and see no cause to acknowledge his forbearance? The Prophet teaches us a more becoming lesson. This was his consolation, amidst his calamities. This I recall to mind, and therefore have I hope.—“It is of the Lord’s mercies, that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. O Lord, thou hast pleaded the causes of my soul, thou hast redeemed my life.” The carnal murmurer considers the evils of his sufferings, but not their alleviations. He feels the rod, and complains; but remembers not, that that life, which was forfeited, is still spared; and, therefore, adds ingratitude to his other sins.

But, further, why doth a living man complain for what he suffers? Who is there, of an awakened conscience, that will not acknowledge, that he suffers less than his iniquities deserve? He has not *been*, perhaps, a notorious transgressor: the eyes of the censorious are not directed towards him. No; he maintains a character for integrity: all applaud him, and all sympathise with him. But, far be it
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from a Christian to assume any claim from God for this, or any exemption from those calamities, which are the lot of man. He is conscious, perhaps, that, though he has received much from the hands of God, he has returned but little, nor has improved his faculties with so much zeal, and spirit, as he ought: he has not supported a constant spirituality of temper. Or, his own backslidings reprove him, and he is desirous of being humbled under them. He is convinced of many omissions of his duty, many secret faults, and many imperfections, which adhere to his brightest virtues. When God, therefore, threatens, he waits *his* good pleasure with resignation,—“It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good:” and when the threatening is actually inflicted, he bows the head and worships: he cries out with the Prophet, “Thou art just, O Lord, in all thou hast brought upon us; for thou art righteous, but we have done wickedly.” For he is assured, that God cannot wrong his creatures, that infinite wisdom cannot err, and infinite goodness cannot willingly grieve the children of men.

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And, if they, who are comparatively good, acknowledge this, what room is there for the ungodly to repine, when they receive the due reward of their deeds? Perhaps, they have, their whole *lives*, forgotten God. He has created them; they have not had the disposition of creatures towards him. He has fed them; they have not owned their feeder. He has spared, but their hearts are fully set in them to do evil. Perhaps, they have been guilty of presumptuous sins; they have not feared an oath; they have profaned the sabbath day. Or, they have dealt treacherously with their neighbour: they have been factious, revilers, ungovernable, disobedient. Or, they have dishonoured their own nature, and worked all uncleanness with greediness. They have followed these courses, and have gloried in them; and they have said in their heart, "I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of my heart." But they find, at length, that there is no peace to *them*; they feel, by some calamity, the controversy that God has against them. What say ye, then, O ye transgressors? Will ye repine at this? Will ye complain that God is just, and that he exercises his justice? Oh, no, be dumb: remember, there is another account behind, that

that this is not the season for its full display. Remember, that you have survived your provocations, and your chastisement; and, throw yourselves upon mercy. The wrath of the Lord now smokes against you; but, when its fires are kindled, they are inextinguishable. Happy are they that take the warning, and are rescued from its torments!

History affords us a remarkable instance, both of the divine vengeance for sin, and of patience under suffering, in the emperor Andronicus Comnenus, a man of a most cruel and ungovernable temper. During the fury of a sedition, he was dragged through the streets of Constantinople, and suffered the most painful indignities. But he was superior to the cruelty of the populace: he uttered no complaint. He only said, "Lord, have pity upon me: Lord, break not the bruised reed."

Whether his repentance was sincere, we must leave to God, the judge of all. But what concerns us to know, we are assured of, that impatience, under suffering, destroys its very end and application. What Christian need be informed, that he is chastised here,

that he may not be condemned with the world; and that, though no affliction, for the present, be joyous, but grievous, yet, afterwards, it bringeth forth the peaceable fruits of righteousness, in them that are exercised thereby? This remedy is appointed, and administered, by the great physician of souls, but its success and efficacy depend upon ourselves. It is necessary, to bring us to reflection, to cure our indolence, to embitter those enjoyments, on which our hearts are fixed, to convince us, that the way to heaven is the way of suffering. Not to receive correction, then, is the mark of bastards: to receive it, and to spurn at the hand from whence it comes, is the mark of stubborn, and disobedient, children. If the former have no claim to an inheritance, for want of admission into their Father's family, the latter are incapable of enjoying it. They have dispositions suited to rebels, rather than to children. They are diseased, and yet pervert the remedy; they mourn, not for the sin, but for the effects of it; and are so much in love with their corruptions, that they reject the cure.

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Let us, then, consider the consequences of this. A man suffers some great calamity. He either does not acknowledge the hand of God, and then is brutish; or he does acknowledge it, and yet complains, and is then impious. What, then, though the suffering should be withdrawn? the sin remains, which is its cause. And should a man be freed from trouble, with his heart unconverted, and his life unreformed, the greatest calamity awaits him, obduracy. To withdraw chastisement, then, is itself the greatest punishment: it is to give the offender over to a reprobate mind. It is thus that God himself represents the matter, by his Prophet—"Because I have purged thee, and thou wast not purged, thou shalt not be purged from thy filthiness any more, till I have caused my fury to rest upon thee." It was thus he dealt with Pharaoh. When he had hardened his heart against affliction, and the plagues of Egypt were withdrawn, he then himself became the victim of human pride and divine justice. Truly miserable, therefore, is that man; for, there is none in greater danger than he, who is chastised, but not taught; loudly admonished, yet will not hear. And when this life is ended, and

the last sentence of the Judge is executed upon sinners, and they feel the wrath of God in full measure, how will they then lament their abuse of the means of grace? Oh, that they could again experience the chastisement of a Father!—that they could again receive the warnings, which are now no more! In the place of torment, it would occasion some suspension of their woes, if those woes could ever be again exchanged for their former trials.

We, then, my brethren, that survive, should always keep our attention awake to the true cause of human misfortunes. For want of this, we have no resource, when they come upon us. We look here, and there, to find relief; and we find it not. We accuse our fortune. The winds, the waves, the seasons, are adverse to us, and they hear not our complaints; we bemoan the treachery of our friends, or the number of our enemies; we curse God, and the king; we blame, through ignorance, and condemn, through malice. Our former comforts lose their relish: we fear, when there is no cause of fear; and suspect, lest the most innocent things should become our bane. In private life, we lose the
sweets

sweets of domestic enjoyment; we carry our misfortunes home, and become tormentors to all about us. In public life, we quarrel with our superiors, and would have them work miracles. When we are lost to a sense of God, we make man answerable for the events of his providence. In vain! man may act with wisdom and caution, but cannot ensure a successful issue. Public events are in the hands of God, and may receive their final accomplishment in distant ages. In the mean time, we suffer; we cannot but feel public distress, but neither see nor know the all-directing hand that smites us. Wilfully blind, we impute not our grievances to the source we ought. But know, O sinful man, thou art, to thyself, the greatest grievance. Thou vain pretender to liberty and truth, if the whole world were free, thou wouldest be a slave. What thou sufferest, even from thine enemies, is nothing to the wounds thou inflicttest upon thyself. No man that is faithful to God, and his own soul, can feel the bitterness of woe. Men may deprive the freeman of Christ of outward comforts, but not of inward consolation. They may torment, and kill, the body, but the better part remains, and will remain. It is in the hands of God, and will survive
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the injuries of this world. Whoever, then, thou art, look not abroad, but look into thine own breast; and thou wilt see the whole cause of thy sufferings unravelled.

Lastly, since, then, the language of politicians is not the language of the religion we profess, let me recommend it to you, my brethren, to lay the words of life before you. Whilst the carnal principles of the world tend to make you strangers to yourselves, the word of God is a faithful glass, in which you may see, not only what you are, but what you ought to be. It is this, which enlightens the darkness of the soul, and brings to open view the secret venom of the heart. Here, then, begin the trial; by this, and by this alone, examine your principles, your motives, your affections: nor be content with this; but call for the assistance of God's spirit there, where it is wanted most, that it may actually begin the cure, and strike that rock, which is the source of evil. You will then see the necessity of the corrections of mercy, and say, with penitent David, "Cleanse thou me, and I shall be cleansed; save me, and I shall be saved, for thou art my praise." Since this is the welcome end of our lives, and labours,

whatever

whatever means conduce thereto, must be welcome also.

This is, then, the language of the truly awakened—As we have experienced, O Lord, undoubted instances of thy love, in blessings, too many to be numbered, and too great to be worthily acknowledged by us, so we confess, the evils, we experience, to be justly due to our offences. Nay, thou hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve. We acknowledge the hand of a Father, in our chastisement, and we know that thou wilt remove it, when it is expedient for us. Thou Father of mercy, thou dost not afflict, willingly, the children of men. We desire, therefore, that the end of thy visitation may be accomplished in us. As we deserve, so we willingly submit to bear severer stripes, rather than sin should possess its place within us. We intreat, that the remaining dross may be purged away. The longings of our souls are towards thee; and, therefore, we desire to be purified still more, that we may the more resemble thee, and be the more fitted for thy presence.

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It is the privileges of Christians, and of Christians only, to entertain such affections as these, in the corrections which they receive. Happy is it for them, that *their* sorrows are not like the sorrows of the world. Christian resignation is the balm, that takes out their sting; and, when all other things have failed, works out a certain cure. Are we poor?—this makes us rich. Do we lie upon the bed of sickness?—a sense of God's love, in Christ, alleviates our pain. Do we lose our friends and relations?—The Lord gave, and he takes away. Do we see the misfortunes of our country?—we mourn the cause, and endeavour to alleviate them. But should our endeavours fail, we remember that this world is not our own, and that better habitations are prepared for us. And should we be called to bear the cross, in any uncommon trials, this is our comfort, that the Redeemer bore it before us, and gives us strength to encounter the greatest difficulties. Thus it is that Christians are enabled to endure tribulation, and enjoy that peace, which Christ left his disciples; that peace, “which the world cannot give,” nor diminish, which is independent of the accidents of time, and is extended to eternal ages. So that, at all times, they are ready to join
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with the pious Habakkuk, "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines, the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat, the flocks shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I *will* rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."

*To God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
be all submission, resignation, and thanksgiving,
paid, now, and for evermore.*

SERMON X.

THE LAW OF CONSIDERATION.

HAGGAI i. 5.

*Now, therefore, thus saith the Lord of Hosts,
Consider your ways.*

THE preface, here, is the voice of God.

It may seem strange, that such a voice should be needful to persuade us to exercise our reason, about a matter of such great importance to us, as the tendency of our own conduct. You will all agree, that consideration is your privilege, that thoughtlessness is your reproach, and, perhaps, will scarce own yourselves deficient in the exercise of that faculty, which distinguishes you from the brute creation. Nevertheless, this is the controversy, which God has against us,—“The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib, but Israel doth not know; my people doth

doth not consider." Many declarations of this have been made in the word of God; many invitations have been given us to descend into ourselves, and enjoy the peace of an approving conscience. But men, in general, are proof against these invitations. Though they walk in the light, they are not blest with its clearest evidence. They have little or no apprehension of the dismal void, that reigns in their souls; or, if they suspect it, the very suspicion engages them to turn their eyes from such a gloomy prospect.

One cause of this disorder is the natural blindness of men, which makes them inattentive to every thing, but what lies immediately before them. When their minds are involved, in this cloud of darkness, external objects seem things of supreme importance, and make them content to be ignorant of what passes within. Observe, only, the unthinking multitude; they "labour for the meat that perisheth," and are satisfied: they know not the value of that, which "endures to everlasting life." Their life is a dream; they pursue shadows, instead of realities. Ignorant of surrounding enemies, and unarmed against them, they are unconcerned; and though in
constant

constant danger of ruin, they banish the very apprehension from their minds.

The business of the world hinders, in others, deep reflection on their souls. This frequently invades the sacred hours, which religion demands, and indisposes men for religious duties. But those objects, which are suited to a worldly spirit, easily gain admittance within, some under the specious name of being the necessary ingredients of life; others, as the improvers of our happiness. At first, perhaps, we imagine we can divide the interests of God and mammon: but we shall soon find, that the service of God is inconsistent with such a choice; that the heart that makes it, will incline, more and more, to an earthly bias, till, at length, self-interest will predominate, mix itself with every endeavour, and debase the faculty of seeing and judging right.

The allurements of pleasure no less corrupt conscience, and blind self-reflection. Its votaries have no time to listen to the still voice within. Besides, softness and indolence are powerful weapons in the tempter's hands, to weaken the moral powers, and quench the spirit.

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When vice puts on the pleasing garb, it conquers, irresistibly, the depraved affections, and its yoke appears easy, and delightful to be borne. All are unwelcome intruders, that would disengage the man from it. He banishes, therefore, if he can, reflection from his mind. For what is it, but to embitter his dearest enjoyments to *consider*, that they are bought with pain, and will end in death?

The evils of this thoughtless condition are many: to be endowed with the power of self-reflection, and yet never to exert it, is much the same as to be entirely destitute of it. Let the consequences of an indiscriminate indulgence be ever so dangerous, the sensual appetite is blind and headstrong, and aims only at present satisfaction. The only ambition will be to enjoy; the only labour, to gratify the passions. But those passions will prove the tyrants of the soul. Should they first be innocent, having lost their guard, they become immoderate and uncontrollable. Danger, then, is imminent, but the inconsiderate man is not sensible of it. The next step he takes may lead him into the pit; the end of his journey will be fatal. Unhappy man! thus to fall a prey to brutish appetites, for want of

using that prerogative, which should distinguish him from inferior, yet less miserable, creatures. Alas! what avails his boasted reason, when, like dumb dogs, that cannot bark, it silently slumbers, whilst the enemy despoils the soul of all its happiness and peace.

The longer you live in an inconsiderate course of life, the more sins and follies you commit, and your danger is the greater on that account. Every sinful action will heighten your insensibility; till, at length, darkness will overwhelm you, unable, not only to practice, but to see, and perceive, what is good. When you are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked; you will say that you are rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing. Then will you sleep, when all things are awake about you. The marriage supper will be prepared, but you will not be ready. Light is come, but you will not bear to view it. What, then, will this darkness, and this indispotion, avail? You call not your own ways to remembrance; you escape the silent horrors of remorse, but cannot escape the open conviction of divine justice. This thoughtless state

that does not alleviate, but aggravate, your sins. This blindness is imputed. Through this, you wilfully exclude the light of God, lest you should see with your eyes, and be converted. What, then, though you endure the pangs of sin with indifference, or even complacency, to the utmost verge of life, this is a momentary hour of ease; this is a period, big with future terrors; this is the dawn of future misery.

You see, then, the ill-effects of a total inconsideration. But let us suppose a man has begun well, and made some progress in religion: still, a neglect of self-examination will render all his former endeavours ineffectual, and drive him back to the place from whence he set out. The beginning of the christian life is the most dangerous part of our race; because our strength is then small, and our courage precarious. Is this, then, a time for negligence? Is it wisdom to expose ourselves to temptation, when we are the least able to endure it? Is it becoming to imagine, that the work of religion will be wrought in us, whether we will or no? We fall, perhaps, into sin; but every fall requires deep contrition, every omission of our duty calls for

double diligence in future. But how shall we redeem, or recover, what we have lost, if we call ourselves to no account for what we have done, nor study to repair our past miscarriages, by a more uniform obedience? How is it possible but such a blameable indolence must end in a stupid lethargy?

Not does less danger arise from self-delusion, with respect to the tenor of our conduct. Our actions may be outwardly good, but our motives wrong. Pride and insincerity may insinuate themselves into our brightest virtues; perhaps, our zeal may not be directed by knowledge; perhaps, forms of religion, which cover the surface, may hide the heart. The opinion of the world, which is swayed by the appearance, not the reality, of goodness, may contribute to delude us. What is to be done in this case? He that would be a proficient in the school of Christ, must not only examine his outward conduct, but his inward desires. He must bring his conscience to the light of God's word; that it may be enlightened, that he may have a quick sense of duty, and that his duties themselves, prove not false and hypocritical. By this exercise,

every action of our duty calls for
double

he will, at length, obtain an open, fair, and candid mind.

Should we find, upon self-reflection, that our souls are out of order, what can concern us more, than to know this calamity, grievous as it is? Surely, the uneasiness arising from it, is infinitely better than a hard-hearted stupidity. When a man is convinced, that he has been unfaithful, ungrateful, and injurious, to God, and his Redeemer; it will, doubtless, fill him with deep contrition, and make him deservedly odious in his own eyes. But conscience, duly awakened, will not stop here. It will also tell him, that his sins have made him odious in the sight of God; that, without repentance, and conversion, his ruin is inevitable; that every moment may drive him to destruction; that, even to sleep in sin, may be to sleep in eternal death. How must a man, who feels the weight of this burden, with deep anxiety, cry out, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" How restless must he be, till he betakes himself to the covenant of mercy, and gains an interest in the divine promises? Then, O sin! will thy wounds be healed: thy charm will be broken, which

made thee appear desirable. The voluptuary will despise forbidden pleasures, knowing that they are insubstantial, and, convinced, that they deprive him of solid peace. The man that now drudges after gain, will then expand his heart, and aspire after lasting treasures. And every repenting sinner, remembering his former bondage, will welcome the yoke of Christ, as the happy means of his deliverance.

But, further, during the progress of religion, self-reflection will assist, and encourage, the willing mind. Animated by the perfect pattern to which he looks, the Christian follows his leader, and surmounts the obstacles which lie in his way. His faith being tried, and found sincere, by the practice of Christian virtues, the conscience of this will enable him to grow in grace, since his labour has not been in vain. Excited by the prospect of future success, he forgets those things which are behind, and reaches forth unto those things which are before, and presses "towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God, in Christ Jesus." Secure of his protection, nothing will seem too difficult to do, or too grievous to suffer, for his sake. By

this means, he attains to a uniform conduct, and perseverance in religion.

From hence true comfort rises; the humble confidence, that we belong to the fold of Christ, creates a fund of joy in our breasts. In poverty we shall find hidden treasures; in the depth of distress, when outward succours fail us, we shall say, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want: he maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters." Amidst the contempt of the world, we shall be honoured with God's presence, and be satisfied. When persecuted, we shall rejoice with inward joy. In every condition, we shall experience a vital sense of the divine favour, producing that peace of mind, "which the world cannot give," and the hope of immortality, which it cannot take away. Are not, then, such prospects, and such privileges, worthy to be discovered? If, by the blessing of God, we are entitled to them, is it not of great consequence, to the comfort of our lives, to be apprized of such glorious blessings?

But, let us look to the end of our lives. Death advances, with hasty strides, and will

come, whether we are prepared for it, or not. One would think no Christian need be admonished of this; for we, ourselves, know perfectly, that "the day of the Lord cometh as a thief in the night;" and we are not in darkness, that that day should overtake us as a thief: we are all the children of the light, and of the day, therefore, let us not sleep, as do others, but let us watch, and be sober. It is the brightness of our inward light, that dispels the darkness of that gloomy day. But, should our souls be overspread with the clouds of sin, the shades of eternal death remain. Who, then, can sufficiently lament the deadness of that soul, that, even upon the eve of judgment, has no eyes to see its inward disorder, nor sense to dread its future woes? O death! how severe is thy sting to them that are at ease! Thy torments, eternity! how insupportable to them who, *then*, shall, in vain, consider! Indeed, if we are fortified by a holy circumspection, death will be so far from finding us unprepared, that we shall meet it with the smiles of a friend we have long expected. Should there, *then*, be a struggle betwixt nature and grace, the divine Spirit will support us in the contest; and, should we, *then*, be conscious of many infirmities,

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firmities, we shall remember, with great consolation, that we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ. Then will those meditations, to which we have been accustomed, prepare us for the happiness we are going to receive, and be changed into songs of gratitude to the Redeemer.

May these reflections, my brethren, engage you to begin immediately the important business of self-examination. The knowledge of ourselves is the most necessary of any, and the most neglected. It is open to the unlearned, but often unknown to the wise: it is easy to the willing, but difficult, indeed, to the perverse. Suffer, then, this plain and faithful expostulation: bear with me, while I entreat you to descend, this day, into yourselves, and enquire, what is the ruling affection of your soul? What is the great evil you abhor? Do you compare the weakness of your faculties with the spirituality of the law? and, does this comparison destroy your confidence, and engage you to seek for mercy? Upon what foundation do you build your hope?—the rock of ages; or, the imperfect pleas of your corrupt nature? Do you consider the origin, and quality, of your actions?

Do

Do you aspire after the sublime virtues of the Gospel; or, content yourselves with such low attainments, as are surpassed by many heathens? Of what complexion are your duties?—does fashion, or humour, give them birth?—or, do you break through every obstruction of a vain world, to contend for those christian works which are unnoticed and despised?

Oh! be not content with such a superficial knowledge of yourselves, as will afford you dreams, instead of waking truths. You know not how soon these dreams may vanish, and give way to serious realities. I call you, then, by the dangers of delusion—by the importance of the event—by the hazard of a miscarriage—by the glory of the prize—by the mercies of your God—by the love of that Redeemer, who died, to redeem you from all iniquity, that you would fly from sin, in all its forms, and look not behind you, lest ye be overtaken by darkness, by despair, by the terrors of the Lord.

Oh! then, let all of us search, and try our ways, by that Gospel, now, by which we shall be judged hereafter. That this trial may be effectual, let us pray, that God would
 011 give

give us a true sense of, and an hearty contrition for, our many sins; that each of us may say, in the language of true penitents,—I have sinned, what shall be done unto me, O thou preserver of men? Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth; I will abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes. For, surely, it is meet to be said unto God,—I have borne chastisement; I will not offend any more; that which I know not, teach thou me, and if I have done iniquity, I will do it no more.

And do thou, O blessed Lord, who willest not the death of sinners, kindle, and establish, these resolutions in us. Rouse us from our slumbers, by thy Spirit; and give us an heart to know both ourselves and thee: that, so convinced of the danger of resting in ourselves, we may take thee for our guide, our saviour, and mighty deliverer.

To whom with the Father, and the Holy Ghost, let us ascribe, as we are most bound, all due worship, and adoration, now, and for evermore.

give us a true sense of, and an hearty contrition
for, our many sins; that teacheth us many ways

SERMON XL.

And, what shall be done unto me, O thou

giver of mercy? Behold, I am vile; what

shall I answer thee? I will lay my hand upon

THE WISDOM FROM ABOVE.

my mouth; I will confess myself, and repent

in dust and ashes. Truly, it is meet to

be said unto God—I have borne chastity

more; I will be obedient; that which

I know not, teach thou me; and if I have

*The wisdom that is from above is first pure,
then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreat-
ed; full of mercy, and good fruits, without
partiality, and without hypocrisy.*

THERE is a twofold wisdom amongst
men; one from beneath, the other from
above. As they proceed from different
sources, so there is the utmost contrariety in
their effects, which are suitable to the causes
that gave them birth. Accordingly, the
Apostle describes the former, as being earthly,
sensual, devilish. All its projects, and designs,
centre in the earth. This is the engine which
directs its motions, whether it aspires after
glory and renown, in the paths of honour;
or is contracted within the limits of sordid
avarice.

avarice to its enjoyments; moreover, are unfavourable to its end. Whatsoever is earthly, is likewise sensual; because the earth can furnish no other gratifications, but such as are agreeable to the animal nature. There is an inseparable union between the world and the flesh: what one craves, the other satisfies, or endeavours to satisfy. So that all the affections of the carnal mind take deep root therein, and bring forth variety of corrupt fruits. But this wisdom is also devilish; for the devil is its author, and unwearied supporter. Taking the advantage of the corruption of men's nature, to make it more corrupt, he establishes his empire on the foundation of their lusts. With pretended freedom, he makes them slaves, till, snared to his service, they come to resemble him in his malevolent qualities, and shew their master in the spiritual excesses of pride, malice, division, opposition, and tyrannical oppression.

How different is this wisdom, from that which the Apostle describes, in the words of the text, — "The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated; full of mercy, and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy."

crisy." Here we see the true source of those virtues, which form the character of vital religion.—"Every good gift," saith the Apostle, "and every perfect gift, is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights." Mere nature bears the fruits that are agreeable to its own stock; the fairest productions of which, though set off by art, and adorned with outward colouring, are still like the vine of Sodom, "whose grapes are grapes of gall, and whose clusters are bitter." On the contrary, what comes from above, must bear the similitude of God. His Spirit is peculiarly styled Holy, as being the root of all holiness, and goodness. It is this, through which we are united to Christ, our head, and endowed with those virtues, which dwell in him. So that where there is the spirit of Christ, there is the mind of Christ. The necessity of this union, and communion, with him, is very emphatically represented, by our Lord himself,—“As the branch cannot bear fruit, of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine; ye are the branches: he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for, without me, ye can do nothing.” The true way, then, to know, whether we
 belong

belong to him or not, is, to see whether we partake of his quickening influences; to examine what kind of fruit we produce, and bring out works to this trial, whether they are correspondent to the mind of Christ. The Apostle St. James will help us in our enquiry: And I shall briefly consider those qualities which he attributes to religion, in the order of his own words; that, as we go along, we may try our hearts by this touchstone, and see what manner of spirit we are of.

"The wisdom, that is from above," says he, "is first pure;" that is, it purifies the hearts, and the minds of men. The vessel must first be clean, before it be fit for any honourable purpose, and prepared for its master's use. This is, therefore, the voice, and the prayer of the sincere disciple, — Wash me, and I shall be clean: let no abomination defile thy temple, but search, and cleanse, the recesses of my soul, with thy purifying spirit. And they, who entertain this heavenly guest, cherish, and entertain, the purity which it brings. They think it not enough to wash their hands in innocence; they banish impurity from their tongue, and licence from their imagination. They endeavour to be holy, as

God

God is holy; they follow hard after perfection. The more they are refined, from the corruptions of the world, the more their faculties are enlarged; they contemplate, with greater admiration, the glories of God; they thirst more ardently, after the enjoyment of him, and receive, with increasing joy, the satisfying influences of his love.

But, further, "the wisdom that is from above, is also peaceable." Peace is a proper attendant upon purity. For, from whence comes wars, and fightings, and enmities?—come they not hence, even from your lusts? Lust is the fruitful parent of the various disorders that infect the world: for, what men inordinately covet, they will endeavour to obtain, though at the expence of more valuable blessings. But, when lust is deprived of its strength, and tyrannical dominion, peace then enters, and begins its gentle reign. Indeed, whatever comes "from above," must bring with it peace, and harmony, since nothing but harmonious peace inhabits there. God, himself, maintains it; and, though heaven be its proper climate, wherever he plants it, there it flourishes. This is "that peace, which the world cannot give," and, which thrives

amidst its storms and tumults. The possessors are conscious of God's love, and, therefore, cultivate it successfully. They avoid strife, with the same earnestness, as the ambitious pursue it: cautious of giving offence, and slow in taking it. They had rather be losers, for the sake of peace, than gain a contentious victory. If ever they hazard their own peace, it is to procure it for others. Even their zeal for Christ, and his Gospel, is never accompanied with those flaming contentions, and oppositions, which, though engaged in the best of causes, certainly testify a corrupt mind. They had rather obey, than dispute; follow, than have the pre-eminence. Their quarrel is with their own sins; their peace, with all men, and the whole creation of God.

The next quality of heavenly wisdom, is "gentleness." When "the Spirit descended like a dove," upon Christ, at his baptism, it was, doubtless, emblematical of that dove-like disposition, which should possess the breasts of all, who received the celestial messenger. It is this, which robs the lion of his savageness, and the serpent of its venom. For men, who, through corrupted nature, are intractable as

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they, are, by religion, disarmed of their malice: their fierce desires are tamed, and they become like little children, fit to bear the yoke of Christ. All true Christians are easily governed: they never oppose just authority, but are willingly subject to every ordinance of man, for the Lord's sake. There is a due mixture of fear, and love, in their tempers, which makes them uniform, and conscientious, in their duty; so that their rulers ever find them submissive; their pastors, conformable; their masters, faithful; their parents, obedient. As they are governed by the spirit of Christ, they are endowed with the meekness of Christ; and, as it was foretold of him, "He shall not strive, nor cry, neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets,"—so do his followers silently tread the same lowly steps. They shew no marks of impatience, in their trials; they provoke none by contumacious reproaches; they offend none by acrimonious manners.

They are, moreover, easy to be intreated; not resolute in perverse opinions, nor obstinate in perverse practices. Some men are of such unpersadable tempers, that the most cogent arguments lose their force upon them. They

are wiser, in their own conceit, than seven men : a knotted oak is as easily bent, as they are inclined to the justest compliances. True Christians, on the contrary, are convinced, both of the natural weakness of their understanding, and the obliquity of their will. They are very jealous, therefore, lest they should be warped by the deceitfulness of their own hearts : so that they regard, not so much the selfish pleas of their own humour, as the unbiased dictates of reason and religion. They embrace the truth, wherever it appears, and bless the friendly hand that guides them to it. Grace is ever ingenuous ; it enlarges the heart, and opens it to calm conviction. This is the desire of a gracious spirit,—"What I know not, teach thou me ;" and this its first resolve, "If I have done iniquity, I will do it no more." Oh ! how happy would be the ministers of Christ, did this teachable spirit prevail in those that hear them ! Their voice would never, then, be the voice of terror ; but would flow with nothing but mild persuasives, and soothing consolation.

But, further, "the wisdom that is from above is also full of mercy," and renders men of a forgiving disposition. Conscious of God's

love, they find themselves rich with heavenly treasures, so that they have no inclination to exact the uttermost farthing from their fellow-creatures. Let those be rigid, who live unblest; let them satisfy, if they can, the cravings of a sordid spirit.

Christians have the most firm conviction, that "God is love;" and, therefore, were hatred to reign within them, they must know, it would make them most unlike to God, and odious in his sight. Hence it is, that their power is never the instrument of cruelty, nor their office, of severity. Whatsoever creature is the object of mercy, finds it from them. They heal the wounds of the afflicted; they prevent the cries of the distressed: the brutes partake of their compassion. Their enemies blush to find, that, for hatred, they receive good; for curses, blessings. Nor are the sincere eminent for their forgiving charity alone: for, "the wisdom that is from above, is also full of good fruits." Indeed, it would be strange, if the seed of God, when cherished by his care, and embraced by those who receive it, should not bring forth variety of fruit. For, "grace is as dew to the thirsty land," so that, when watered

watered by it, "Jacob shall take root; Israel shall blossom, and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit." In like manner, the hearts of men are, hereby, melted into pity, and their hands opened to relieve the indigent. They consider themselves as the stewards of God, and the poor, the appointed receivers of his bounty. This makes them chearful givers, superior to mean applause, unbiassed by any thing but universal love. This makes the rich willing to impart their liberal streams, in proportion to the fulness of their fountain. Nor are the faithful poor less ready to cast their mite into the common treasury, that they may testify, by a little, the use they would have made of an abundance.

Another property of the heavenly wisdom is, that it is "without partiality," either with respect to themselves, or others. "God," we are told by St. Peter, "is no respecter of persons;" and they, who are taught by him, have their minds exercised to discern between good and evil. Hence, they are endowed with a single eye, and unadulterated taste. Conscience is, with them, neither blind nor inactive. They are willing, that this "candle of the Lord" should search the recesses of the heart,

heart, that they may discover their inward corruptions, and, when discovered, mortify and expel them. They desire no toleration for a favourite lust—no exemption for the sins, that easily beset them. They are not fond of exclusive privileges, nor insist upon injurious rights; and, as they deal faithfully with themselves, they judge impartially of others. They are not biased, by outward show, to accept the persons of the mighty, nor call the proud happy, nor scornfully tread upon their poor brethren. The inward glory of the Christian shines brighter in their esteem, than the magnificence of kings, or the renown of victorious generals. Led by the plain commands of Christ, neither reverence, nor friendship, obstruct their passage to immortal bliss. No attachment to a party, in religion, debases their minds; nor do the loudest calls of artful men betray them into the paths of bigotry and schism. With respect to their censure of others, christian love is the principle that sways them. No difference of opinion alone, can make them judge harshly of others, nor coldness of behaviour fill them with evil surmises. Though they judge themselves with severity, they judge others with candour, and leave their final doom to the
great

great Judge of all. "Charity," saith the Apostle, "believeth all things;" charity hopeth against hope; and they who are endowed with it, had rather err with love, than hold the truth in bitterness and rigour.

True religion goes one step further: it is also "without hypocrisy." The works of Christians are clear as the light, and open as the day. The sun wants no addition to its beams; no more do sincere believers need either guile, or ostentation, to make them more conspicuous. It is impossible *that* should be true light, which is set up for a mark of vain glory, and is fed by the vapour of popular applause. Good men, as they receive all they have from God, to him look for their reward. They embellish not their character by falsehood; they hold not back the truth, to gain the praise of men. What, though the world neglects, and despises them? Poor world, thou knowest them not! Far superior to thy censures, and thy applause, they have the testimony of their own hearts, which is better than a thousand trumpets; they have an humble assurance of faith, and firm confidence in God, who knows, and approves, their sincerity.

Thus, my brethren, I have endeavoured to enforce the Apostle's character of true religion. Let me intreat you, then, to examine yourselves, by these marks, that you may know whether you belong to Christ, or not. You cannot refuse the trial, because the day is coming, when there will be an exact scrutiny, not only of the actions, but of the principles, of men:—"when the Lord shall search Jerusalem, with candles, and punish the men, that are settled on their lees." Should any be resolved, now, to avoid the scrutiny, I would address them thus,—Vain deceivers! will you walk by one rule, and be judged by another? Will you take your sentiments of religion, from the maxims of a corrupt world, when you have that word before you, which condemns its corruptions? Though you impose upon yourselves, can you impose upon your Judge? Can you expect salvation from his hands, without bearing the marks of salvation? Judge, therefore, yourselves now, that ye be not judged of the Lord.

In order to assist you in this judgment, let me ask you,—Are you desirous of the wisdom, that is from above? Are you enamoured of its excellency? Do you seek for it, as for hidden

hidden treasures?—Or, are you fully content with your own attainments, and even depreciate the invaluable gift? Are you studious of universal purity?—Or, do you greedily imbibe the stains of a corrupted world, and place your chief felicity in debasing enjoyments? Do you follow both outward, and inward, peace?—Or, are you slaves to restless passions, and turbulent desires? Are your spirits tamed by religious discipline? Do you willingly put on the gentle yoke of Christ?—Or, are you apt to flame, in fierce rebellion, whenever your will meets with opposition? Are you easily led into the right way? Do you suffer the word of exhortation from your teachers?—Or, does a secret indignation rise in your minds, when we deal faithfully with you; so that, fully wise in your own conceit, you close your eyes against the light? Have you felt the emotions of a sympathising spirit? Are you ready to forgive multiplied offences, with the same willingness, that you receive forgiveness?—Or, do you harden your hearts against your brethren, and brood over your resentments with malignant satisfaction? Are you fruitful in every labour of love?—Or, does your formality betray itself, by the selfishness that governs you? Are you impartial in your obedience,

science; consistent with yourselves; candid in the judgment you form of your neighbours!—Or, are you warped, from the line of duty, by self-opinion, and mistake God's partiality to you, for your own partiality to yourselves? So that, indulgent to yourselves alone, you are severe only to others, and, so far forget your station, as to sit up for judges of your fellow-creatures, and, by that means, betray your guilt, and condemn yourselves. Lastly, is your outward appearance a real copy of your heart?—Or, do you not hide the rottenness of your heart by a fair outside, and think to atone for sin, by an ostentation of religion?—

Do you, then, my brethren, in truth, acknowledge the necessity of this “wisdom, that is from above?” You cannot have it without its fruits:—nor will the fruits be hidden. They will appear in your conduct here; they will be manifested, to your unspeakable joy, hereafter. This wisdom is the one thing needful: there can be no substitute for it; its loss is not to be retrieved. Be faithful, then, be earnest, in its acquisition: Oh, search for it, as for a pearl of great price, which will make you rich, indeed. Seek it
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from that heavenly spirit, through which, alone, you obtain it. If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him. There is an inexhaustible fund in the love of God, through Christ, who hath opened the treasury of the divine riches, and invites the poor, and destitute, to partake of them. To him go, assuredly knowing, that, in him, all fulness dwells; and, that he is as liberal of his favours, as you are urgent and necessitous.

If you are already possessed of these heavenly graces, diligently cherish, cultivate, improve them. The same spirit, which first imparted them, will then confirm you in their possession: so that, by his co-operation, you will go on from strength to strength, from one degree of grace to another, till ye come, in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.

Now to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, be all honour, and glory, ascribed, henceforth, and for evermore.

SERMON XII.

THE EVILS OF LICENTIOUSNESS.

DEUTERONOMY xii. 8.

Ye shall not do after all the things, that we do here this day, every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes.

WHILST the Jews were travelling through the wilderness, many of their legal injunctions would necessarily be dispensed with. But, when they should gain possession of the land of promise, Moses informs them, their wanderings from duty would be restrained, and the complete observation of the law be bound upon them. This, it may be owned, and we have the Apostle's testimony for it, was very burdensome. At the same time that it had the aspect of mercy, in affording employment for their faith and hope, in the typical displays of the atoning sacrifice

sacrifice of Christ, it tended to bridle their corruptions, by the rigour of its precepts. Before sin entered, one injunction alone was given. But, in proportion as the passions of men became exorbitant, commands and prohibitions were multiplied, and penalties were added, to make them effectual. The Apostle tells us, "that the law was not made for a righteous man, but for the ungodly, and for sinners; for the unholy, and profane." However, the penalties of God's law being remote, except with respect to the jewish nation, every society of men hath found it necessary to apply a more immediate restraint to the human passions, by certain punishments, proportioned to the malignity of different crimes.

Nevertheless, the same depravity, which made restraints necessary for man, at first, makes him averse to submit to those restraints. He has still a humour to be gratified, and a will to be indulged. He is, therefore, desirous of being his own master; and, though he may acknowledge, in words, his dependance upon his Maker, his mind secretly revolts against his commandments; and when he can, with impunity, he disobeys them. If

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this be the case with God, much more is it, with respect to his fellow-creatures. Though subordination be necessary, his pride is hurt by being subordinate: he becomes the priest, and preacher, of equality: he claims a right to model his own behaviour as he pleases; and sets up his own imagination, as the rule of his conduct. When arrogance of mind is heightened by the carnal appetite, it makes men uneasy under the mildest governments; so that they disdain to keep that station, in which Providence has placed them. It makes them fond of innovation; and believe, that any other situation is preferable to their own.

So perverse is man made, by his corruptions, that the more liberty he has, the more he is urged on to licentiousness. Wise and good men, in framing laws for human conduct, have always been careful, not to invade the rights of humanity, nor to be too severe upon human frailty. From hence, however, this imperfection arises, that the laws will, sometimes, be inadequate to their end; at other times, defective in their execution. The passions of evil men, being blind, and craving, and importunate, will avail themselves

selves of this, to multiply disorders; the influence of power, and wealth, will give the possessors an uncontrouled range; so that libertine excesses, like noxious weeds, in a kindly soil, will thrive exceedingly, in a land of freedom.

A melancholy proof of this is afforded, by many, in our own nation. Our great men, too often elated by the privileges of their rank, breaking through the restraints of religion, from a libertine education, and enslaved by a strong attachment to pleasure, claim the further privilege of living above the laws. Whilst the poor take the advantage of their lenity, to add boldness to their offences; and, because they are set free from oppression, set themselves free from subordination also. This spirit of licentiousness has, within a few years, in this country, greatly increased. The conspiracy against order seems, almost, general amongst us. Duty is silenced by privilege; and authority weakened, by the number of offenders.

Though, then, it would be in vain to expostulate with such, as are far gone in licentious practices, and make whatever is right, in

in their own eyes, their rule of action; yet, the endeavour to check this spirit in others, is required of every judge of morals, and every dispenser of the word of God. I shall, therefore, in the following discourse, shew the evils of licentiousness; or, such a behaviour, as tramples on the restraints, by divine, or human, laws; first, with respect to the peace and order of society; and secondly, with respect to man himself, as a moral, and accountable, agent.

And, first, the rights of individuals are necessarily circumscribed within certain limits, because they must be considered with reference to the whole society. Had man full liberty to do what was right, in his own eyes, no society could long subsist. Men's passions would interfere with each other: what was most desirable, would have the most numerous claimants. Opposition, and fierce contentions, would arise; craft would succeed; and, mutual distraction would be the issue. But let us suppose, as we must, that there are restraints, yet subject to be broken through. In proportion as these restraints are despised, men will encroach on the rights of others. The laws cannot provide against every injury,

or

nor punish every offence against duty: subterfuges will protect many; and number will, sometimes, bid defiance to the justest penalties of law. So that, what licence began, under the cloak of liberty, will end in anarchy. This is slavery of the most grievous kind, in which there is neither peace, nor order, nor property, nor protection. In such a situation, the most worthless will assume the greatest authority; force will usurp the place of wisdom; and men will have many masters to please, whose tyranny will be equal to the extravagance of their passions.

Innumerable are the instances of these evils, afforded by the history of our own, and every other, nation. During the civil wars, and the oliverian usurpation, when fanaticism blew the trumpet of rebellion, no good man can read the shameful prostitutions of God's word, the crying acts of injustice, the merciless oppressions that then prevailed, together with the total overthrow of true religion, and good manners, without astonishment. And, if we turn our eyes to a neighbouring country*, the crimes of former ages are there accumulated, and present such a picture, as none but the wicked can look upon, even for

* France.

a moment, without horror. These are mirrors, which shew the extravagance of human licence: by gradual efforts, it, at length, establishes the empire of violence; and, by whatever name it dignifies itself, every duty which we owe to God is sure to be degraded; and the most virtuous, and conscientious, will be the greatest sufferers.

Thus men, by doing whatever is right, in their own eyes, are, themselves, the destroyers of true liberty. Nothing is so easily perverted, by the licentious, as freedom; and therefore, free governments, in order to preserve it, whilst they are tender to human infirmity, should check the first efforts of the bold, and, with unrelenting hand, should execute the laws against malignant offenders. What a delightful prospect would appear,—alas! too pleasing to be expected in these scenes of guilt, if justice always overtook the insolent aggressor, and if mildness were not abused by the licentious. A free constitution would, then, be the greatest of earthly blessings, since it would be a blessing to the good, a protection to the weak, a security to the innocent, a relief to the wretched. The voice of oppression would, then, be heard no more;

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the profane would be silent; the shameless would not glory in their shame; nor wickedness appear with the ensigns of authority. Religion would, then, be encouraged; the modest would be rewarded; and pious men would lead a quiet and peaceable life, in all godliness and honesty.

But, secondly, let us consider the evils of licentiousness, with respect to the souls of men. When men of carnal minds habitually commit sin with greediness, the voice of conscience, by being frequently checked, daily becomes weaker and weaker, till, at length, the understanding is debased, and the common notions of good and evil, astonishingly perverted. Trifles are then reckoned things of the highest importance, and whatever suits the depraved appetite, the chiefest good. It is in vain to talk to such sinners, of the mild, and placid, virtues, of holiness, and divine pleasures; they are foreign to their relish. It is in vain to talk of a sense of duty; they glory in their deliverance from its bondage. Accordingly, they esteem those to be their truest friends, who would discharge them from their obligations; and those, the betrayers of their rights, who would check them in

doing wrong. Impious persons think it a part of their liberty to profane the sabbath-day,—to blaspheme the name of God,—and to trample on divine ordinances in full security. Schismatics claim a right to vilify their proper pastors, to multiply divisions, and introduce anarchy into the church of Christ. The seditious demand a licence to despise authority; the malicious, to destroy private characters; and both of them, to spread their poison, and their slander, to the utmost possible extent. From this spirit it is, that arrogant young men hold the aged in contempt; that men of low degree, pass by their superiors without reverence: they claim the privilege of the fashion to carry, in their neck, a sinew formed of iron. From this spirit it is, that the lewd, and the voluptuous, give the rein to their corruptions, and withhold not their hearts from any joy. Indeed, men may so long indulge this evil spirit of licence, as really to think, that, whatever gratifies their humour, or their pride, is just and right.

As licentiousness debases the understanding of men, so it strengthens their corruptions. The original depravity of our nature

ture is urged on to maintain itself by continual efforts; till, at length, after repeated gratifications, a habit is formed, which becomes part of ourselves, and is diffused over all our faculties. Sin, then, becomes insatiable, and unrelenting; and the lusts of the old man receive a tincture, like that of the Ethiopian, not to be effaced by any thing less than almighty power. With sinners, like these, the common methods of reformation fail. Heaven, and hell,—time, and eternity, are swallowed up in their benighted souls. They take fire at every opposition to their actions; and whenever opportunity permits, are inflamed to a degree of fierceness, like that of savage beasts of prey.

Will, then, may a licentious, and ungovernable, spirit, contract a high degree of guilt, in the sight of God. Quietness, conformity, and mutual subjection, are ordinances of God; and they, who regard his authority, will follow peace, and order, and obedience. They, who regard it not, will justify themselves, in their own eyes, in an opposite demeanor. If the laws are against them, they will be against the laws. Having set up the light of their own minds, as the director

of their actions, they will oppose whatever offends against the majesty of their idol. All obligations, human and divine, must submit to this. For, conscience can have no place, where a conceited stubbornness rules the hearts of men. Know, then, O ye, who do what is right in your own eyes, know against whom ye offend: your murmurings, and your oppositions, are not against man, but against the Lord.

We may add to this, that the licentious person disowns his profession, and renounces the Gospel of Christ. What are the virtues, that are recommended there? Humility, contentment, resignation, and the frequent abridgement of lawful liberty. These are the virtues of the cross; these are exemplified in the life of Christ. But these are spurned at by him, to whose taste they are not suited. It is true, these are duties enjoined by the Gospel; but, he will call *that* Gospel, which has no duty in it. However, he cannot alter the nature and truth of things. The Gospel strikes at the heart of his corruptions. It shews us, that the world is not our home; that we must be raised above it, and aspire after a heavenly country. The children of
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this world, then, may seek for an habitation here, but they will not find it. Politicians may form plans of freedom, independent of God; but men will not be more free: civil liberty is real slavery, if destitute of christian freedom. Hence it is, that the Gospel speaks not the language of politicians. It constantly refers the prosperity of the world to the establishment of the kingdom of Christ. So that, when the royal graces of the Gospel flourish, and abound, then peace and happiness abound likewise; true liberty is secure, and slavery confined to the breasts of the ungodly, and disobedient.

Indeed, God often shews his displeasure against the licentious, by taking from them that freedom, of which they know not the use. Many nations have made long, and obstinate, struggles for liberty; but they have mixt with those struggles faction, lawlessness, and a disregard to God. Providence was, therefore, against them, and they remain the monuments of justice, in being deprived of equal laws, or enjoying only the name, and the appearance, of liberty. But, though they should be permitted here, to gain
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all, the utmost licence can give, let them not glory in this forbearance: for, mighty sinners shall be mightily tormented. And, should they be hurled, through their own perverseness, into those regions of woe, where no glimpse of hope can enter, they will then know, that the severest punishment is reserved for those, that dared to commit atrocious sin, because they dared to do it.

My brethren, you have often been appealed to, as members of civil society: your privileges, as Englishmen, have been often recounted. Suffer me, an individual, to place the christian glass before you, which will not flatter; but, if you are wretched, will shew you your own wretchedness. Remember, then, when all earthly distinctions are no more, you will be brought to this single test,—have you submitted your souls to the Gospel of Christ? This Gospel interferes, both with your principles, your conduct, and your manners. It does not allow you to be elated with the most distinguished privileges; much less, through them, to follow your own wills, in opposition to the Lord that bought you. Do you, then, consider, not so much what you may

may do, as free, as what you ought to do, as under the law to Christ? Do you comply with every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake? Or, do you refuse obedience, when it is not forced upon you? If you do, this plain consequence arises,—that you are governed by the carnal mind, that you pursue what you once renounced, and forfeit your title to the blessings of the christian covenant. Bring, then, your principles, your conduct, and your manners to a review. Rest satisfied, no longer, with pursuing what is right, in your eyes; but remember, "there is a way, which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." What, then, will it profit you, that your consciences have given you no disturbance, in following the ways of your own hearts, when God's book contains an impartial memorial of all your deviations from his will, and your sentence will be passed as it is written there?

Oh implore, then, and pursue the spirit, and the mind of Christ. When you have submitted your souls to him, with the simplicity of children, you will break the most galling chains, and overcome the world. Take,

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then, unto you, the whole armour of God, that you may accomplish this victory. At the same time, that you are grateful for the privileges of civil liberty, remember to aspire after the superior excellence of christian liberty. Your love of order will, then, be elevated to christian virtue; your loyalty to your prince will be accepted, and rewarded, by God, because from him it springs; and you, yourselves, will be more established in faith, humility, obedience, resignation, patience. These are the marks of true freedom. These are attended by consolation, peace, dignity, and blessing.

But, should any amongst you, which God forbid, shelter yourselves from the conviction of these truths, under your political, or religious, opinions, such shelter will be vain. Your sin will find you out; for, God and you are of different parties. Produce, then, your cause; bring forth your strong reasons; collect your force, and set yourselves in array against him. If this be madness, you have no alternative left, but submission to his will. To day, therefore, "if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts: turn ye, turn ye,"

ye, from your evil ways; for why will ye die?"

SERMON XIII.

Now to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, be all duty, and adoration, paid, henceforth, and for evermore.

PETER II. 10.

MY brethren, were we to stand in this place, to count your approbation, and aim at a popular character, we should carefully avoid the very mention of sins; to errors as these, which the Apostle reproves in the text. However, this is the burden, the relation we bear you have upon us, to speak to your necessities, excluding from our exhortations every topic foreign to our trust, or unworthy of our office. So that, whatever duties are contained in the Gospel, we ought to inculcate; whatever sins are there forbidden, we ought to reprehend in their proper character, notwithstanding the delicate tenderness, or

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SERMON XIII.

REVERENCE TO DIGNITIES.

2 PETER ii. 10.

Presumptuous are they, self-willed, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities.

MY brethren, were we to stand in this place, to court your approbation, and aim at a popular character, we should cautiously avoid the very mention of sins, so enormous as those, which the Apostle reproves in the text. However, this is the burden, the relation we bear you lays upon us, to speak to your necessities, excluding from our exhortations every topic foreign to our trust, or unworthy of our office. So that, whatever duties are contained in the Gospel, we ought to inculcate; whatever sins are there forbidden, we ought to represent in their proper character; notwithstanding the adverse sentiments, or prejudices,

prejudices of our hearers. And I have, therefore, chosen the words of the text, because I am persuaded they are so exceedingly applicable to a great number,—God forbid I should say the majority amongst us,—that the Apostle, St. Peter, could not have produced words more comprehensive, or suitable to their real manners,—“Presumptuous are they, self-willed; they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities.”

I shall endeavour, in the following discourse, to set forth the peculiar guilt of these sinners, that, by warning you of their practices, you may be preserved from evils so destructive and epidemic.

In the first place, the sinners the Apostle mentions, are “presumptuous,” that is, bold and daring in their offences. This shews ripeness, and perfection, in sin. God hath been pleased to ordain, that sin should not arrive to its completion, without gradual advances; without receiving, and overcoming, many checks, arising from different principles. For instance, there is a timidity implanted in human nature, arising from a sense of our own inferiority, which lays a restraint upon

us, and I compels us to respect the wisdom, the virtues, the age, the station, of others. There is, also, a kind of bashful shame, which keeps under the petulance of youth. There is a fear of that punishment, which human laws have annexed to certain injurious practices. Above all, there are the checks of conscience, which, aided by the divine Spirit, warn us of the guilt and punishment of sin. But all these may be overcome: experience convinces us, that a high degree of self-conceit makes young persons deaf to the calls, and admonitions of the wise; that the more we rise in self-esteem, the less we shall regard those endowments in others, which challenge our veneration; that many, who reverence an exalted station, make a mock at grey hairs; that many, who are awed with riches, despise the superior endowments of the mind; and that rank, and station, lose their authority, when a spirit of faction, and false liberty, prevails. The bashfulness of youth is often very early discarded; it is a troublesome companion, and checks the career of their dissolute spirits. As to the dread of human punishments, who knows not, that the law, if it does not entirely overlook, connives at many grand offences; that its penalties are often evaded,

evaded, through the remissness, or false lenity, of juries, and magistrates; and the very magnitude, and popularity, of crimes, are sometimes the means of escaping punishment.

The checks of conscience are also liable to be overcome. God's spirit will not always strive with man: after many warnings, to no purpose, the very means of grace become the means of obduracy. The baleful effect of all this is, boldness in sin which operates, in proportion to the number of the restraints that are overcome. Thus it is, that men, being made forgetful that "the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth," and that they are dependent upon him,—forgetful, likewise, of the rank they hold, with respect to their fellow-creatures, lose that stability, which arises from the divine support. Nothing then remains, but that they assume a false dignity, make themselves their own idols, and close with that sophistry of the devil,—“Ye shall be as Gods.”

It is this boldness in sin, which makes men troublesome, and injurious, to others. Having lost the guards of virtue, whatever passion they indulge, is carried to excess. But excess

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of passion is contented with no ordinary gratification. If it be not dishonourable, in the eyes of the world, it becomes matter of boasting, and of triumph. But, should it be countenanced by national manners, however contemptible in itself, it assumes the dignity of virtue. Lust loses its shame, it converts the man of pleasure into a beast of prey, in betraying innocence, and bringing ruin upon whole families. Pride swells into arrogance and ill-manners, into insolence. Wherever human laws are silent, the presumptuous sinner takes the advantage, and seizes the opportunity, to commit iniquity. Should they happen to be suspended, the most flagrant acts of injustice will be perpetrated, in the face of the sun, and the most abject of mankind will become heroes in sin.

Sinners of this complexion, as they are intolerable to others, so they are no less hurtful to themselves. For, if every departure from God produces misery, much more an entire alienation from him. The very privileges they enjoy are converted to their bane. That sweetest of blessings, liberty, is a blessing only to the wise, and good. It emboldens the presumptuous to plunge the deeper in their

their sins. It tempts them, when no sensual inclinations are indulged, to be offenders. By seeking excess in every gratification, they fall into the various evils, and disorders, which accompany excess. Sometimes, they become early victims to their folly; or, should their sentence be delayed, their hearts, on that account, are fully set in them to do evil. But let them not glory in this forbearance; the severity of the divine judgments is sometimes seen in hardening those, that are already hardened, and permitting them to drink the full measure of their iniquity.

But, secondly, another property of these sinners is, that they are "self-willed." The consent of the will, in some measure, adheres to every sin. The commission of it gratifies our passions; and, therefore, it becomes the object of our choice; at first, perhaps, with reluctance, because it is against our real happiness, and the unbiassed dictates of our own minds. However, the perverse will of man, in following its own desires, gets fresh vigour, in proportion to the obstructions it meets with; and, at length, by an habitual indulgence, becomes the strongest chain that binds the human heart. Did you never experience

how difficult it is to turn the stream of your own humour, even in trifles? You are accustomed to those trifles, and vindicated by self-love, in their pursuit. But, with how much greater difficulty is the will to be controuled, when it is engaged in the support of your dearest inclinations. Let your understanding be ever so clearly convinced that you are doing wrong, if your own self-will urges you on, you will *persist* in doing wrong, against the reproof of others, and even of your own minds, hopes, and fears, the voice of Heaven, and even the terrors of an avenging God. But let your will be once turned, the charm is broken, and the giant, Sin, hath lost his power.

It must be confessed, indeed, that this happy change is seldom wrought in the contumacious sinner. For when the will predominates, it calls in the aid of other faculties, to support its claims. What, though arguments may be brought, from a variety of topics, against his practices, yet he also reasons, in his own defence. The more knowledge he is endowed with, the more sophistry he uses. He finds some resource in vulgar prejudices. He cloaths religion in a false character, and holds

holds it up to ridicule. He attacks the doctrines he cannot comprehend; he vilifies the duties which he hates. Though constrained to confess acknowledged principles, he so withdraws his attention from them, that they have no operation upon his mind. He is then enabled to call evil, good; and good, evil. Diverged both of the hopes, and fears, of the future world, he rejoices in his portion, and thinks all is well. If the light that is in him be darkness, how great is that darkness! Encompassed with error, he mistakes the plainest road; and, despising all wisdom, but his own, he disdains to be led into the right way. Indeed, he mistakes a perverse, and obdurate heart, for an upright conscience. Dreadful as this condition is, it is the portion of many, under alarming visitations, and even upon the bed of death. Have not, then, the ministers of religion reason to warn you, "left any of you be hardened, through the deceitfulness of sin?" And, ought you to account us your enemies, if we frequently caution you of the danger of that rock, "self-will?"

Thirdly, when pride and self-will have taken possession of the heart, as men are dissatisfied with God's plan of government,

and cannot brook that subordination, in which they are placed, how easy is the transition, to express with their tongues their inward disgust; and, though many scruple to go the lengths of the blasphemer, with respect to their Maker, yet, pretending that God is not concerned to support his authority, where he has placed it, “they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities.” The terrors of the Lord, indeed, were they properly weighed, as they would fill the impious with trembling, so they would repress the boldness of the intemperate tongue. But when men are under no such restraint, from religion, they will avail themselves of the weakness, or forbearance, or imperfection, of man, and say,—“we are they that ought to speak, who is Lord over us?” In the mean time, the contagion spreads; the conduct of superiors is made the favourite topic of declamation; and the lowest of the people, who are certainly the most licentious of all ranks amongst us, become pretended reformers, and point out, with malicious satisfaction, the faults of the highest. Nor do they blame the faults alone, but, perhaps, the virtues: for virtues are easily changed into crimes, by the arts of calumny and misrepresentation.

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Let us, now, consider the ill effect of this behaviour on society. What is the end of the different ranks of men? Are not some placed over others, that order, and harmony, and justice, may take place in the whole community? But, how can this be obtained, if men destroy the reverence due to governors, and pull them down to their own level? In a land of liberty, where the rights of human nature are preserved, men are prompted to obey, from a regard to character, and good opinion. Where that is lost, the authority of the laws is in danger likewise; and the generality, it is to be feared, will watch the opportunity to evade them. The quiet, and peaceable, and they who obey for conscience sake, will suffer on that very account: they lose the best protection that society can give them.

If we consult religion, the revilers of dignity act in the most determined opposition to its dictates. The Gospel rule is, "to speak evil of no man," because it is contrary to the golden rule of love. But, to speak evil of dignities, offends against both love and duty. It is to offend against those, whom men are under peculiar obligations to honour. Christians are exhorted to pray for all that are in authority,

authority, that men may lead a quiet and peaceable life, in all godliness and honesty. But the malice, or the pretended love, of an evil tongue, and sincere devotion, are inconsistent: nor can any good arise from the prayers of the hypocrite, or the profane. Wicked men, indeed, are not careful to answer in this matter: they are unconcerned about consequences. It is pre-eminence they hate; and, therefore, they attack it: it is God's government they dislike; and, therefore, in opposition to his will, they invade his prerogative.

Since, then, these sinners shew the extreme degeneracy of human nature, whence is it, that persons, pretending to religion, often carry an unbridled tongue? It is, because they are but pretenders. Some mistake the form for the substance of religion, and deceive their own hearts; others, mixing their own passions with it, swell with pride, and vanity, and divide the church of Christ, instead of growing in love and christian graces. Therefore, they become false accusers, whilst only their own party escape the venom of their tongues. How different was the behaviour of the great Apostle, nay, of an Archangel, towards acknowledged

known wickedness in high places? St. Paul retracted what might be thought just severity, in one of his exalted character, as an Apostle, towards a perverter of the laws, "I wish not, brethren," that is, I did not consider, "that *he* was the high-priest, for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people:" and St. Michael, in a contention with the prince of darkness, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, "The Lord rebuke thee."

But you will, perhaps, say, Does a superior station sanctify a fault? By no means. It is highly aggravated, and more offensive to the divine Majesty, on that very account. Must the great, then, not be told of their offences? Undoubtedly. Consider, now, the persons, against whom I have been directing this discourse: the publicly slanderous; the presumptuous; the self-willed; those who judge with ignorance, and censure with malice; those who abuse their liberty, and are daily diffusing their poison, and who, though their censures were just, are still more guilty than those they blame. It is the duty of *authorized* instructors, in the spirit of zeal, and of love, to be faithful in rebuking sin, whether in high

or low, to warn the highest of their ingratitude, and of an approaching reckoning; and in this, likewise, St. Paul hath set us a noble example. When he stood before the Roman governor, a man of profligate manners, "he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come," and made Felix tremble.

Let us enquire, then, how a private Christian will behave, when iniquity abounds in high places. He will certainly avoid public slander, for the reasons I have mentioned; nay, he will discourage it, by all means in his power. He that has a real aversion to sin, will not make it a matter of ridicule, or self-applause; the more destructive it is, the more he will lament it; he will beware of its contagion, and dread its progress in himself. If there be many examples of wickedness among the great, it is certainly a great calamity, and a loud call to all to real mourning. It would be a calamity, my brethren, were *we* without blame. But, is this really the case? If impiety, and forgetfulness of God, be too general among *them*, do *we* abase ourselves before him? Are *they* lovers of pleasure? Do not many of *us* envy their capacity of enjoying it? Are *they* negligent of public utility,

utility, and of our particular interests? This is more than can be, with truth, affirmed. They cannot command events, or stop the raging of the sea, or controul the madness, and depravity of millions. In the mean-time, the public suffers, and *they* cannot help it. They can resist the torrent of iniquity, but cannot ensure success. They can frame laws conducive to happiness, but, through the depravity of others, cannot enforce the execution. They can be liberal, in founding, and supporting, various institutions of charity, but cannot command the gratitude of those they serve. But, my brethren, have *they* no charge against *us*? Good men have,—for being ready to follow their *ill*, not their *good*, example; for not preserving the limits of our station, and giving no honour, where honour is due; and God has,—for perverting the light he offers, only for the discovery of defects in others. So that, by judging *them*, we condemn ourselves.

Oh, then, that every one, who names the name of Christ, would pay a greater regard to the wisdom of his Gospel, than the maxims of a mistaken world. If not supported by this Gospel, the fairest pleas are vain; if
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against this, the clamours of multitudes are of no force. Be diligent, therefore, in engraving that lively word into your souls, and you will have a touchstone, by which you may try the spirits, and be enabled to judge righteous judgement. As the lying oracles of the heathen world gradually lost their power before the Gospel light, so, *now*, it is able to discover the devices of the crafty, as well as the impiety of bold pretenders to liberty and truth. Without this, you are deluded by every idle tale-bearer, and the prey of many destroyers; greedy to imbibe the scandal of the day, and utter strangers to the condition of your own souls.

My brethren, it is in vain for you to elude the force of these reflections; and, should you be guilty, it will be difficult to give them their full operation upon your hearts. For, from what variety of arguments will vindications of yourselves arise! How many passions will be stirred up, and spurn at the intrusion of any other spirit than your own? But remember, that the word of God has stronger reasons than you can bring, and there are more potent affections, which demand entrance into your hearts. The reasons
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are, that your sins will find you out; that sin, being unmortified in its principle, forbids reconciliation with God; that his terrors are set in array against every opposer of his kingdom. When these reasons are duly weighed, and applied, by the spirit of God, to your souls, you will then be humbled before him, withdraw your pleas, and confess your guilt. You will, then, make supplication to your judge. Then would a dawn of hope arise; for, whom sin had wounded, the Saviour of returning sinners would heal.

Come, then, to the great physician, you that know the sorrows of a heart, revolted from his love. Take his yoke upon you, for "he is meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest to your souls." You will aspire after real dignity, and desire no pre-eminence among those that contend with God. But, knowing your own place, and station, you will keep them. Humble as children, you will receive, with meekness, the engrafted word, and will grow up, under its guidance, to be, in understanding, men. A regard for God's authority, in all the relations of human life, will distinguish you, both from the libertine, and the enthusiast. So that, even in
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this arrogant age, you will not be ashamed, either of the reverence due to your Maker, or of the regard you owe to your superiors. This lowliness is the way to exaltation; and at last, "when the son of man shall come in his glory," whilst the bold and obstinate, the froward, the self-sufficient and rebellious, and they who do not tremble, when they speak evil of dignities, shall tremble, when they hear their final sentence, "Go ye cursed," and shall be thrust down to hell, you will ascend with saints, and reign with angels, and live for ever with the Lord.

To whom with the Father, and the Holy Ghost, be all glory, and majesty ascribed, now, and for evermore.

SERMON XIV.

SUBJECTION FOR CONSCIENCE-SAKE.

ROMANS xiii. 5.

*Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for
wrath, but also for conscience-sake.*

WHEN I consider that you have all been baptized in the name of Christ; that you profess allegiance to him; that you acknowledge you must stand, or fall, according to the influence of his Gospel, upon your lives and manners, I should scarce imagine, there would be any occasion to prove, by variety of arguments, or recommend to your practice those duties, which, had there been no revelation, you could not have neglected, but at the expence of peace, and the happiness of social life. But when I reflect, on the other hand, upon the difference between a nominal profession of religion, and its vital energy

energy and power; the great force of evil customs; the mighty tyranny of national sins over the mind and conscience; and the plausible claims of an unsubdued and independent will, all conspiring to make you evade, and even despise, the plainest obligations; I see an absolute necessity to build these obligations upon the firmest foundation, and inculcate them with the most powerful motives.

Subjection to governors is one of those duties, so expressly enjoined by the word of God, that you cannot dispute it, without rejecting the authority of that word. "Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's," says our Lord. "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man, for the Lord's sake," says St. Peter. "Let every soul be subject to the higher powers," says St. Paul: he adds, "For there is no power but of God, the powers that be are ordained of God." As a consequence of which it follows, "Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake."

That this duty has certain limits cannot be denied: for "we ought to obey God rather than man." Other limits there are, which, in
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the end, terminate in this, and are to be determined by the manifest calls of God, our country, and our posterity. But these excepted cases are not mentioned in holy scripture; for they carry their own provision with them. Self-preservation will engage men more powerfully to oppose the encroachments of tyranny, than conscience toward God to submit to mild and legal governors. Indeed, there is seldom occasion to insist much on the boundaries of a duty; for the corrupt heart of man is too apt, of itself, to make exceptions to whatever duty it is naturally averse. Many, therefore, regard this duty of obedience as if it were made up wholly of exceptions, reasoning against their obligations, and explaining away the divine precepts. A symptom this, too prevalent amongst us, and of very dangerous tendency. I shall, therefore, confine myself to your necessities, and endeavour to apply the duty in the text to your hearts and consciences.

All government, from the nature of it, implies obedience. The end of it is, that peace, and order, and harmony, may be established. The forms of government are, indeed, various, suited to the genius, and necessities,

cessities of different communities; but they differ more from each other, in their outward administration, than in their spirit and intention. Hence the Gospel, which was intended for the good of society, as well as individuals, establishes obedience in general to the powers that be, but interferes not otherwise with human systems of government, so as to prefer one before another. It is to no purpose, then, for *Christians* to reason abstractedly upon the power of princes: whatever governors may justly command, they are bound to obey. Laws, indeed, are owing to the imperfection of human nature; but, as they are necessary, no one can plead an exemption from them. For if one, why not others? Why not all? and then a general confusion would ensue. They are, therefore, the sinews of the political body; they give to each part its proper strength and vigour, and conduce to the stability and perpetuity of the whole.

These laws are attended with a variety of penal threatnings; for without this appeal to the fears of men, they would lose their force, their intention being to restrain the weaker passions, by their operation upon the stronger. However, whilst there is room for artifice,

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and evasion, in cunning minds, whilst there are men of audacious dispositions, regarding only present gratifications, laws require the succours of religion, to supply the defect of temporal penalties, by denouncing vengeance from God against transgressors, in future worlds, which shall be as lasting as themselves. So that an outward submission to the laws is always proportioned to the influence of the fear of God upon the conscience.

Further. It is not sufficient for you to abstain from glaring acts of injustice. The true welfare of social life depends on a discharge of such obligations, as are faintly supported by human laws. But will you comply with these, unless you are actuated by a principle superior to their own? Or, if a national depravity of manners should produce a kind of general agreement to suspend the execution of the laws, against such licentious practices, as suit the public taste, will you, if destitute of this heavenly principle, glory in your obedience to such laws? Nay, will you not rather boast of your pretended liberty, and follow, without remorse, a multitude, to do evil?

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But granting that, without the aids of conscience, you would conform to a strict obedience, would that obedience be accepted in the sight of God? It would not: for all authority being derived from him, you must acknowledge God, in your submission to that authority. Were God to govern you without the intervention of human legislators, your obedience must then be directed to him alone. But since he governs you by men, like yourselves, you must regard them as his ministers; their laws as his laws; and their just commands, as derived from the throne of God. If your hearts are thus disposed, you will be swayed by an universal principle of obedience, independent of fashion, or the voice of the sinful multitude. When no eye beholds you, you will tremble at God's presence: when you dread no earthly avenger, you will remember the Judge of all. In this land of liberty, you will not abuse the indulgence of human tribunals, nor boldly commit sin, because you may sin with impunity. Whatever you do, you will do as the freemen of Christ; and whilst others are guided by no conscience, or a conscience weakened by sinful prejudices, or perverted by false and enthusiastic notions of religion, you will clearly discern, that sub-
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mission to God is true freedom; and an obedient mind, your highest exaltation.

This sense of your duty to God will also engage you to promote the good designs of your rulers: God hath so constituted men, that they mutually require the assistance of each other. As in the natural body, it is the business of the head to contrive, and the hands to execute; so, in the political system, unless subjects will dutifully co-operate with every regulation that contributes to the public good, the best intentions of those that govern, must fail of the end, for which they were ordained. In free governments, the intentions of those, that preside, are rather appeals to the consciences of the governed, than constraints upon their will. In proportion, therefore, to the influence religion has upon them, they will exert their best endeavours. If religion has lost its hold upon the conscience, virtue and public spirit will, perhaps, be the cry of their mouths, but the proud and selfish passions will predominate; so that they will oppose their rulers, for the sake of opposition. They will glory in it, and call it patriotism. Under their banners, the ignorant and bigoted, the lewd, and licentious, will enlist; and

though they take no other weapons, but those of diabolical rancour, will disturb the peace of society. So that free countries do not always experience those blessings, which they promise in the idea of philosophical minds. Nor, indeed, need we go further than our own times, and nation, for a proof of this.

But, remember, brethren, the kingdom is the Lord's: Righteousness and peace encircle his throne: order, and harmony, and subdual, are the injunctions of his almighty will. None are enemies to these, but the spirits of perdition, and the children of darkness. If you, then, are the friends of God, you must promote, according to your ability, the glory, and increase, of his mild, and pacific, reign. Lukewarmness, here, is next to rebellion. The kingdom of God, and that of satan, are too powerful, and urgent, to admit of any neutrality. Should you have no direct influence in the side of human affairs, faithfulness to God and man will engage you to offer up your prayers for kings, and all that are in authority, that they may be the instruments of his blessing, and diffuse their benign radiance all around them. Indeed, what does the duty itself require of you, but to shew the efficacy

efficacy of a christian temper; unless, indeed, you can be Christians without the performance of christian duties; and experience the power of godliness, without the effects of godliness, without desiring that the kingdom of Christ may come, and the graces, which he taught, may rectify, improve, and exalt, these miserable scenes.

Another, and that not the last, nor the least, part of your duty to your governors is outward reverence and honour. This must be paid not to the man, but the office, or rather to the man, for the sake of that office, with which he is invested. Where this is not the principle, authority is of little use. It is beholden to the humour of men for its influence: it derives its support from the popularity of a character, not from the proper efficacy of the function. A vain support, indeed, which is no sooner withdrawn, than it can neither preserve itself from contempt, nor others from injury. But with Christians, the matter will bear no contradiction. The rule is,—“fear God, honour the king.” Give honour to whom honour is due. Magistrates are called God’s ministers; and that, when some of the worst of the human species filled the highest

stations. Upon this ground, then, the reverence you are to pay them rests. If you honour them, because you are struck with the pomp and ensigns of their office, you may as well be idolaters with such a disposition. If you are under constraint, from fear, you pay the homage of slaves. Mean and unworthy motives! But God, knowing their weakness and insufficiency, hath laid the foundation of this duty in his own authority; so that our religion should produce, not indeed a servile dread, but a sincere and active loyalty, and that our loyalty should rest upon the basis of our religion.

I shall mention one more instance of duty, you owe to those that are in authority, which is a candid judgment of their actions. He, who knows not human imperfection, knows not himself. What man is there amongst you, that requires not some indulgence from his fellow-creatures? If this be necessary in the common affairs of life, much more in the arduous province of superintending an extensive empire. Besides, princes are less able to ward off the darts of calumny than others; they cannot always explain the motives of their conduct; they must often either be insensible

of wrongs, or bear them without reply. Common humanity, therefore, to which all are entitled, should be *their* advocate also. But I shall appeal to a more powerful one, religion. It is a part of the reverence you owe to God, to refrain your tongues from his representatives. His command is,—“thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people;” and his judgments are kept in store, against “the presumptuous, the self-willed, and those that speak evil of dignities.” Indeed, the same disposition, which makes men capable of rashly judging superior powers, makes them capable of censuring the highest of all. The Israelites, when God was their king, murmured against God; they talked boldly of their grievances; they pleaded, against God, the encroachments upon their rights. Need we wonder, that profane persons amongst us, should endeavour to maintain their party by reproachful insinuations; that the press teems with slander and abuse; and that every returning day pours forth its rancour like a flood. Surely, were it not, that he, who commandeth the waters, and saith to the raging sea,—“hitherto shalt thou come, and no farther,”—restrains likewise the madness

of the people, we must have been overwhelmed by the waves of the ungodly.

Lastly: Hence, then, we may learn what is the proper test of true patriotism. We shall not seek it, in the noise and bellowings of unprincipled men; in the advocates for speaking, and acting, without controul; in popular leaders, elated with accursed ambition; nor in the slaves of vice and dissipation. We have, here, the true touchstone of duty, and the actions of men; we are taught the things, which will be owned, and which will be rejected by the Judge of all; we are enabled to give wanton opposition, faction, rebellion, their proper names. Here, we may behold the different spirits, and effects, of false and genuine religion; and whilst we see true religion producing its proper fruits, candour, duty, loyalty, obedience; we see false religion teeming with self-will, pride, slander, and defiling the pure fountain of the Gospel, with turbulent associations, and causeless divisions.

Thus, my brethen, you may learn, that in the public, as well as the private relations of life, your business is with God. In all things, he will be served, he will be obeyed.

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"As I live," saith the Lord, "every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God." As you derive your all from him, so by him must all your duties be sanctified—to him must all your actions be referred. Your very consciences must submit to his direction; nor is it lawful for you to entertain any other principles of duty, than what he hath established. Without him, your light is darkness, and your truth a lye. Without his approbation, actions, the most applauded, are of no value; and objects, the most esteemed, lighter than vanity. The simple truths of his word are more exalted than the demands of patriots, or the maxims of politicians; more sacred than the rights of citizens; more noble than the fate of kingdoms; more lasting than the world. By this word, shall all controversies be determined; and thus will prove, in the end, not to have been between man and man, but between God and man. Should your hearts rise against this powerful word, you cannot evade its force. As slaves, or free, you must obey. Should you condemn it, it will not be condemned; should you oppose it, you fight against the Most High. Bend, then, under the hand of your Maker. Ye vain professors of liberty,
abuse

abuse not that sacred name; claim not privileges, which belong only to the freemen of Christ. He is your king;—if you regard him not as such, can you expect his protection? Can you enjoy peace? Can you prosper? Can you, at length, prevail? What, though you maintain your independency, whilst your judgment is suspended, how will you support yourselves, when your empire shall be brought low, and your habitations removed, under the anarchy and confusion that shall succeed to everlasting ages?

Should any of you, my brethren, see cause to condemn yourselves for neglecting, or opposing, the duty I have enforced, what hopes can you derive from yourselves? If you have abused your privileges, your privileges will become a source of woe, whilst the law of God has many transgressions in reserve to augment your reckoning. You have no refuge, then, but in mercy; no relief from slavery, but in that law of liberty, which, under the guidance of the divine spirit, will restore and renew your souls. You will, then, not take your sentiments of duty, from the cry of a vain world, but the judgment of God. You will distinguish the cause of liberty, and religion,

religion, from the noise of vain pretenders to both; nor refuse to try all your ways by that Gospel, which God hath ordained to try you hereafter. You will know yourselves, and your rank; and keep your proper station. The glory of God, and the good of man, will regulate your pursuits. You will expect no more from this world, than it is able to give you: amidst all its various changes, you will be steady and serene. And, as you will live without murmuring, you will retire with resignation; and, at the close of all, when faction, slavery, and rebellion, shall be banished to the depths of hell, you will abide for ever in the mansions that are above, blessed with peace, and harmony, and uninterrupted joy.

To God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, be all honour, majesty, and dominion ascribed, now, and for evermore.

SERMON XV.

PROFITABLE READING.

1 TIM. IV. 13.

Give attendance to reading.

IT would be too curious, and, perhaps, unedifying, a disquisition, to enquire, whether the christian world is really wiser, and better, for the great multitude of books. Knowledge has its temptations, as well as its privileges; and the means, by which knowledge is conveyed, may either be hurtful, or salutary, in proportion as the end itself is well, or ill, directed. However, it is certain, that those means ought to be chosen, and preferred, which conduce to the best and wisest end. Whether men, when they have a variety of means before them, leading to the attainment of knowledge, will actually choose those, which contribute to real improvement, depends

pend upon their disposition for true wisdom. It may, then, be to no purpose to direct the advice of the Apostle to the wilfully ignorant, to the scorner, or the unbeliever. But the humble, and enquiring, Christian may, doubtless, obey the injunction, so as to derive, from such obedience, manifold and substantial blessings. Nor let it be said, that Christians of high attainments, and living in the fulness of the gospel dispensation, have no need of this method of instruction, as being too low, and merely elementary; for you will observe, the advice is given, in the text, to a person blessed from his childhood, with a pious education, an equineat proficient in the word of God, endowed with singular gifts, and even in his youth, ordained by the Apostle a bishop of the church of Ephesus. *Give attendance to reading.* says the Apostle. Need it be proved to reasonable creatures, that knowledge is necessary to man, and that ignorance is the disgrace of the rational nature? Will it be denied by any, but those sunk in sensuality, that religious knowledge is essential to the very existence of that love, and reverence, which creatures owe to their Creator, and that faith, which opens to

the redeemed a prospect of divine treasures? The very relations, and the end of many, shew us the destination of our proper talents, and prove to us, that our faculties, for acquiring knowledge, should be employed in a manner conducive to their best improvement. It is in vain to say, that there is no occasion to go far for necessary knowledge, and that the monitor within is a sufficient guide to man. For, what is this guide itself, if unimproved and unenlightened? Heathens, indeed, who have no other light, than that which is afforded by the intimations of natural conscience, must make the best use they can of what they have. Where the seed has been sown with a sparing hand, a liberal harvest will not be expected. But with Christians the case is far otherwise, and the objection of no force, with respect to those, who have opportunities for acquiring superior knowledge. A price is put into their hands, to get wisdom of inestimable value, with which no other acquirements can come in any competition. This wisdom is inconsistent with sloth: it is to be sought for with labour, and improved with care. A failure here, is attended with greater danger than in any other science. There is no ignorance so great

great as that of the soul; no delusions so lamentable as those of a perverted mind.

Reading may be considered either as a means, whereby we attain original knowledge, or refresh our minds with the memory of those truths, which we have already learnt.

With regard to acquiring knowledge, it behoves plain Christians, first, to seek after those divine principles, which are necessary to the very existence of their religion. These are derived from the word of God, which, by revelation, informs us of many things, of which nature gives us no intimation. It shews us our origin, and our end, our misery, and our restoration; the influence of the new covenant, which God hath made with us, through Christ, and its accomplishment in future worlds. Hence arises our obligation to "search the scriptures," and read them, both as a test of doctrine, and rule of practice, that we may know God, and Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent; and that, knowing them, we may walk in the light that leads to everlasting life. These things, from their very nature, are not mere matters of speculation: they have a far superior tendency, than either to entertain the curiosity, or gratify the fancy.

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To be thoroughly acquainted with these things is the most sublime knowledge; to neglect them, is to forego the most valuable privileges of our nature, and become brutish. To study these requires the attendance of our time, and the attention of our souls. There is a depth in divine truths, which escapes the observation of superficial readers, and is only to be fathomed by those, who "read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them."

Nor is reading less useful to refresh the memory of religious knowledge. Striking and important as the objects of it are, they are liable to be defaced by the things of this world. The fancy, and imagination, the cares, and anxieties, of life; the various scenes of amusement; the very business, and labours, of the world; the sophistry of evil men; all conspire to blot them from our minds. Reading, mixt with devotion, brings them back to our thoughts, and our affections. By a kind of creative power, it represents absent things as present; pours things invisible upon the eye of the mind; and brings the future wonders of existence in review before us. So that when those meditations, which religion inspires, are losing their ardour and their spirit,

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by this pious exercise they are refreshed, till, at length, they become habitual to our souls. Indeed, they are so necessary to preserve the power of religion in the midst of an evil world, that it requires no prophetic gifts to know the state of that man's soul, who seldom or never reads the writings, in which they are enforced.

Reading is also a proper sequel to hearing, and contributes to make it efficacious. Many hear the word; they seem to listen, and to be attentive, but without advantage. They hear it with their ears, and are for a while impressed, (and, oh! how sunk in brutality must those be, that can hear it without impression) but then it vanishes with the preacher's voice, and their hearts are closed to all its convictions. The pious and fruitful hearer carries his attention home; he searches the scriptures; he imprints it there in lasting characters, and desires that his heart may be the book, in which it may remain for ever. "This man being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, is blessed in his deed."

Such a one has learnt the commendable art of filling up the vacancies of life with im-

provement. Men of learning, and of leisure, may gain, from their opportunities, an hundred fold. Men of laborious occupations must be content with less. But let *them* plead no excuse for a total neglect of occupying *their* talents also. For let me appeal to the most busy :—Does your worldly calling give you no relief?—Do you never want to kill time?—Do you never sacrifice, to indolence, those precious hours, which your souls demand of you? The Lord's day is set apart for your growth in religion. You intermit the labours of your calling: but if you know the value of time, what you take from care, you will not give to sloth and pleasure. If you know the prize of your high calling, you will not mis-spend the consecrated hours, and forego the work of God, for the entertainment of a public-house. Nor will you be content with the mere task of reading, and then return with eagerness to your wonted haunts and conversation; but you will be consistent with your profession, and frequently forego amusement, as well as gain, for the far nobler employment of searching into the treasures of divine wisdom,

Such a one has learnt the commendable art
 of filling up the vacancies of life with im-
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Nor, indeed, is it less pleasant than profitable. The pious Christian, in edifying, and still retirement, though shunned by the voluptuous, and the gay, envies not their boasted happiness. Though placed in solitude, he is not alone: he enjoys the company of those, who are not to be found upon the theatre of the world, and in conversing with whom, he receives the purest satisfaction. These enliven the departing hours; and when they are fled away, they leave a sweet memorial behind them. Amidst the storms of life he enjoys repose: he alleviates the evil of the present days, by a delightful review of what is gone before, or a still more charming prospect of future worlds. O ye votaries of pleasure, here is delight!—serene, yet lively; independent upon chance; at once improving, and adorning, time.

How low, then, are those in the scale of rational beings,—how far behind in the discipline of Christ, who complain of solitude as a burden; who fly from the wise, as their tormentors; who depend upon company, like themselves, for their happiness, or take refuge in some vulgar pleasure. The world is no school for just sentiments, or truly religious

principles. It's very conversation abounds with temptations, and is full of evils. It is, at best, trivial, often pernicious. Maxims, the most unfriendly to religion, are daily propagated, and meet with applause in most companies. They are the very life, and spirit, of the convivial club; and the man, who dares to obtrude unfashionable truths, is the jest of the whole society. In religious solitude, and retirement, far other principles are instilled. Wisdom, then, takes the chair, and, with a dignity uncontrouled in silent energy, and persuasive eloquence, instills the truths of God. By this rule, the Christian's ear is governed; by this touchstone he tries, and judges, not only the public sentiments, but those of his companions. The insinuating tempter, and the arrogant scorner, in vain endeavour to divert the steady purpose of his soul.

But may not the faculty of reading be perverted? Undoubtedly. It is a talent which may be employed to the good, or hurt, of its possessor. As, therefore, we are accountable for this, as for all other talents, to the Lord of all, we shall suffer, either if we hide it in the earth, or use it to mistaken and destructive ends.

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Let us enquire, then, what kind of writings should chiefly engage the attention of the humble seeker after wisdom. That the word of God, the fountain of wisdom, should have principal regard, can be a matter of no doubt with believers. But no little improvement may likewise arise from the writings of others, whose piety and learning are well adapted to edify the church of Christ; in some of which, things, hard to be understood in the divine oracles, are explained; and in others, the lively truths therein contained, are applied to the various circumstances, and urgent wants, of those, for whose benefit and consolation they were revealed. A similar conduct is pursued, with success, by the learned professions: the lawyer, and the physician, both improve by the knowledge, and experience, of those masters, that have excelled in their respective sciences. Why, then, should not Christians profit by the labours of those holy men, whose superior endowments have made them, under God, the instruments of the most valuable blessings? Amongst these, books of christian practice, the foundation of which is laid in the covenant of mercy, through the Redeemer, demand the preference among common Christians. Indeed, they *will* be

preferred by the sincere. Notions, however orthodox, will not satisfy those, who are desirous of being established in the love of God, and adding to their faith, virtue.

The lives of the eminently pious, written by those, who are animated by the same spirit of piety, are also of admirable use, to draw out the latent virtues of the soul, and inspire us with the noble ambition of imitating such bright examples. The lowly graces of christianity, as peace, meekness, humility, resignation, submission to ordinances, and obedience to God and man, want, in these days, the support of such glorious precedents, in order to check the perverseness of their degenerate sons.

But further, reading is also a faculty, which may be used to a mistaken purpose, and perverse end; and it is so, when it is employed by ignorant and superficial persons, about points of controversy, concerning which, men, disposed for disputation, have always differed, but which the pretender to knowledge presumes he can clearly settle. This is attended with consequences fatal to true religion. Here, the more ignorant a man is, the more bigotted;

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the more bigotted, the more conceited, censorious, and obstinate. The imaginary knowledge, he has, is the means of his undoing. And whilst he treats religion more as a system of notions and opinions, than a divine principle to rectify the heart, regulate the conduct, and mend the manners; whatever he reads, it is with a distorted eye, either to find an occasion of blame, or to establish himself in his own vain and fond opinions.

There are some treatises, both of the last and the present age, in which, with a very small share of piety, and still less of charity, experiences, and convictions, assume the name and character of religion; so that every relative duty is degraded, and the finer virtues of our calling depreciated. Not that the true Christian is destitute of experimental religion; but I caution you against the errors of those, who mistake the suggestions of their own fancy, or the mere effusions of spiritual pride, for the oracular responses of God himself. Such writings as these, therefore, should be rejected by ordinary Christians, as unedifying and dangerous, and should give way “to the doctrine according to godliness,” in which, ex-

perience is made the hand-maid, and humble attendant, of vital and practical religion.

Let us consider another instance or two, in which, the faculty of reading is often employed to a bad and destructive purpose. We are told that the Athenians spent their time in nothing else, but to tell, or hear, some new thing. In this disposition, vast numbers of us are their legitimate descendants. To read the news of the day is attended to, by them, with such avidity, as almost to absorb every other reading: it is their *Bible*, their *Prayer-book*, their *Whole Duty of Man*: it is their law, and their gospel: the busy, as well as the idle, generally find time for this gratification. Here, those, who are strangers to themselves, misemploy their time, and their attention, upon the actions, and fate of others. Here, they learn false patriotism, and pretended virtues. Here, they unlearn the modesty, which true religion inspires; and from hence, they claim a right of directing, and blaming, those that are above them. The effect of this is, what may justly be expected from those, who, unguarded by christian knowledge, and an affection for the word of God, are blindly led

led by libertine maxims, to a most libertine conduct.

As our newspapers have contributed to form our ungovernable manners, so most of those productions, which are poured from the press, under the name of novels, tend to make them loose. In some of these, the open incentives to vice are displayed, to tempt the corruptions of nature to be more corrupt. In others, the poison is gilded over with decency, and ensnares with greater facility, the young and unsuspecting. In others, the most atrocious faults are represented as objects of pity, rather than resentment. Then their guilt vanishes, and the conscience becomes more favourable to vice. In many, that are most admired, sentiment is adopted for virtue, real virtue is never seen, and false patterns of imitation are recommended to the heart. The observations I have made upon these dangerous writings are, in general, applicable to our modern favourite comedies.

My brethren, there is too much reason for these cautions. We live in an age, in which, books of real improvement find few readers ;
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whereas, books of trifling amusement; books in which sacred truths are questioned, or doctrines are insisted on, at the expence of of morals; or in which pernicious morals are inculcated, find many admirers. I might appeal to many instances of this, if it were not too notorious. No sooner do works appear, in which, irreligion, ribaldry, and abuse, are seasoned with a sprightly imagination, than they immediately attract the vultures of the land, who will demand, with eagerness, still more of such envenomed publications. That you may be fortified against such poison as this, seek after books of real use, and moral instruction. Books of well-written history are the mirrors of God's providence. Books of natural knowledge, if you have abilities for them, display the wonders of his goodness, wisdom, and power: by attending to these studies, virtuous minds will become more virtuous, and the wise will attain to greater wisdom.

Lastly; whatever your opportunities and talents are, take to yourselves the word of God for your light, and your guard. Read it in your families, and your closets. Let

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your reading be attended with devotion : pray over divine truths, that the spirit of your God may make them spring up, and increase within you. Beware of formality in this, and every other instrumental duty ; it will lull to sleep, and though you read, you will not be edified. Should any of you, who now hear me, have not been blessed with this talent, from the necessities and poverty of your education, you have still opportunities for edification, by hearing, marking, and diligently attending to religious truths. Should any of you, who have this talent, have neglected it, this very day begin to improve it ; to-morrow it may be required. Should you be indisposed for that attention, which the truths of God demand, begin with a short portion, and consecrate that by fervently looking up to God, that he would pardon, and help your infirmities. The scorner seeketh wisdom, and findeth it not. He reads, and becomes more confirmed in prejudice and error. Oh ! then, do you seek it humbly, dutifully, affectionately, that you may improve under the divine discipline, and as you grow in knowledge, you may grow in humility ; till, at length, every thought and imagination being subdued to the obedience of

of Christ, his word may be glorified in you, and be to you, as it really is, in its spirit and completion, the word of eternal life.

To whom with the Father, and the Holy Ghost, be all glory, and majesty ascribed, now, and for evermore.

SERMON XVI.

GENUINE REPENTANCE.

I KINGS xxi. 27.

And it came to pass, when Ahab heard those words, that he rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly.

THE words, which produced this remarkable effect, were uttered by the prophet Elijah, and contained a denunciation of God's wrath against Ahab, for his many provocations, concluding with this opprobrious sentence,—“him that dieth of Ahab in the city, the dogs shall eat; and him that dieth in the field shall the fowls of the air eat.” Upon which, his conscience smote him, knowing that he had offended against a God of infinite justice, and believing the threatnings that justice had denounced. So that, terrified with
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the view of approaching judgments, he shewed all the external marks of sorrow. We have no reason to believe these marks were counterfeited; for we are expressly told, that "he humbled himself before God." Nor was this humiliation entirely destitute of efficacy: it produced a temporary respite of the evils threatened, and the doom of his family was prolonged, till his son had filled up the measure of iniquity. However, though his sorrow was real, his repentance was imperfect, and insincere. He still continued wicked, inasmuch that we are told,—“there was none like unto Ahab, who did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord;” and that, not content to dishonour God in his own person, he made Israel also to sin. There is no intimation of any change in his disposition, and he died with the same character, with which he had lived.

There are other instances, in scripture, of great pangs of sorrow, on account of guilt, accompanied with fruitless penitence. The concern of Herod, the repentance of Judas, the trembling of Felix, are there recorded as loud warnings to us, lest we should grieve, as they did, and perish in our sins. However,
this

this delusion is not yet eradicated. It cannot, then, be improper to strip it of its disguise, that *that* repentance, which brings no future sorrow, may possess and restore our souls. Some men grieve merely for the temporal distresses, to which they are reduced by sin. Penury, and *want*, often extort self-reproach from the idle, and the dissolute. Others are, perhaps, unfashionable in their excesses, and stain their character; or they ruin their health by debauchery; or forfeit their lives to the community, for their injuries and violence. In all these cases, the most acute sorrow may seize them for their crimes, whilst the vicious habits, that gave them birth, remain unsubdued.

Moreover, natural conscience, unaided by these woes, often raises such tumults in the guilty breast, that neither affluence, nor pomp, nor empire, can quiet. Tiberius confessed to the Roman senate the horrors of his mind, inflicted by his enormities; and Nero, after the murder of his mother, imagined that he was haunted, and possessed, by the furies. All this is very consistent with the hardest heart. The wickedest of men are thus constrained to bear an unwilling testimony to the divine justice;

justice; as Christ, in the Gospel, forced the demoniacs to confess the divinity of his character.

The dread, which sinners feel, from the forebodings of their own minds, may be so great, as to stifle every other thought. Hence, the influence of superstition to alleviate the torments, which their fears administer. So that they put on the garb of mourners, and afflict their souls. In this case, they think no sacrifice too precious, wherewith they may appease the wrath of God. Many have overcome the power of natural affection, and offered up their children at inhuman altars, whilst others have endured the strongest bodily sufferings, for the good of their souls. Is there an enlightened Protestant amongst us, that does not explode such remedies as these? Yet how many still make use of those, which are inadequate to their cure? They have committed iniquity; they dread the punishment, and therefore they grieve. But let them not mistake such sorrow as this, for true repentance. It will be found, that, should their fears decay, their contrition will evaporate; and when the present danger ceases,

ceases, their lusts return, and take full possession.

Sometimes, the word of God may be so applied to the hearts of wicked men, as to cause great commotion there. It did so in Ahab, in Simon the magician, and in many others, constrained by their terrors, to acknowledge the power of that God, whose mercy they reject. Sometimes, it goes further, and causes good beginnings. We are taught this, in the parable of the sower: the seed that fell upon the stony ground was not altogether rejected; it quickly sprang up, and promised fair for a future increase. But not entering deep into the unkindly and accursed soil, it had no lasting hold, and as quickly withered away. In like manner, how many are struck, with the importance and danger of their souls;—*almost* engaged, by the word of life, to renounce sin, and embrace salvation. They love to hear of it, and *seem* to take delight in the exercises of religion; but not being deeply affected with the sense and demerit of their sins, their cries for pardon are quickly over; their repentance wants its true foundation, and after the next powerful temptation, leaves

nothing behind it, but the ruins of broken vows.

Besides, many feel remorse deep, indeed, but not sufficiently extensive for the demands of the gospel, the commandments of which are exceeding broad. So that hypocrisy often maintains its ground, when supported by partial convictions; and sincerity, in some points, endeavours to atone for insincerity in others. Hence, men, repenting of some sins most devoutly, cherish others with abundant complacency. Perhaps, my brethren, we are concerned, that we have neglected religious duties; but, do we equally condemn ourselves for the dealings of injustice, and a worldly, and avaricious, spirit?—Or, we are willing to be reconciled to our neighbour, and make restitution; but, are we truly contrite that we have rebelled against God; and do we pray, with earnestness, to have our pardon sealed in the blood of his son? We are desirous to give up great and notorious offences, but plead for continuance in some darling frailty, which we cannot part with. Brethren, “a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.”

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True and unfeigned repentance take its rise from a conviction, wrought by the assistance of God's spirit in the soul of man, of his apostacy, through sin, from the fountain of all good. When truly awakened, he perceives his own unhappiness, in being deprived of the glory of his existence. It fills him with sorrow, to reflect, that he has deserted the Lord his maker, and turned him into an enemy. His heart is ready to fail, on account of his transgressions, and, upon a reflection of their aggravations, to sink into utter despondency. Whither shall I fly from the presence of God? — where shall I hide me from his displeasure? O sin, I taste thy bitter fruits! I will bewail my own perverseness, and ingratitude, and cry for mercy. To my offended Father will I go, that I may be restored to the privilege of his adopted children. His voice, and his spirit, now invite me; his promises afford me a gleam of hope; and the great physician, who came to seek and to save the perishing, will heal my broken spirit. When his heart is thus engaged, he makes no delay; he abhors the poison he drank in before; he discovers the deceitfulness of sin, in all its disguises, and resists temptation. His strength is derived from God, to whom he looks, and

his repentance is gradually completed in the renewal of his mind, and the restoration of his faculties, enabling him to perform sincere obedience. Here, then, is a change of heart, of life, and manners. This is a work, whose foundation is laid deep, not liable to be overthrown by every affailing storm, and whose superstructure is dignified with the title of God's building.

If then, my brethren, you lay any claim to this virtue, is it not of the utmost importance to know, whether it will bear this trial, or whether it be only the delusion of your own fancy? You acknowledge that you have been sinners; but, you hope that your repentance has been accepted, at the throne of mercy. Did it, then, arise from a real conviction of the demerit of sin? Was it attended with a hatred to it, on its own account, as well as the present sufferings it occasions, and the still greater you dread hereafter? If it has no such foundation, you lament not your sins, but the evils that attend them. You lop off the branches; you spare the root. You are sorry that sin should be so great an evil, and followed by such dreadful woes; if it were not,

not, you will still pursue it as your delight and happiness.

As the true origin, and seat of sin, are in the heart, it is necessary to begin the cure where the disorder lies. If, in our recovery from sin, we aim only at a fair appearance, we may gain, indeed, our end. By external shews, we may recover our reputation, in the eyes of man, who is often satisfied by promises, and earnest professions. But God will be content with nothing, but the real conversion of the soul to his obedience. It is this he tries; it is this he judges. And, oh! how important, how interesting to us is *his* judgment of us. Be not, then, deceived;—for, “whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” If we sow an ignoble seed, we shall reap what we sow, but must not expect an harvest, from thence, fit to be admitted into the stores of immortal life,

But the hypocritical penitent is also condemned by his own acknowledgements. He confesses the wrath of God to be due to his sins, yet leaves them uncanceled. Whilst he vainly deprecates his justice, he falsely presumes upon his mercy. He implores the pity

of his Judge, at the expence of his holiness and truth, and rather than forsake his sins, would wish there was no Being, of infinite perfections, to take cognizance of them. Be consistent, then, O thou false pretender to contrition!—and withdraw thy plea. What madness is it to persist in that, for which thou condemnest thyself? And what folly to condemn thyself for that, which thou art resolved to do?

If, then, my brethen, you would avoid these imputations, be serious in the prosecution of that work, which will have a serious issue. Let your deportment be agreeable to your condition; and your sorrow for sin, in some measure, answerable to the sorrowful evils it produces. But, perhaps, you will say, that you are not such sinners as Ahab was, and, therefore, you have no occasion to put sackcloth upon your loins, or repress the sallies of a chearful spirit. You hate to acknowledge sins, you are not guilty of. Why should you? But have you, then, *no* sins, of which you do not repent? Though you have not been idolaters, like Ahab, have you not, in your hearts, departed from the Lord? Have you never debased your souls, by the idolatry of the affections,

affections, and so withheld, from the God that is above, that spiritual service which is due? You have never wielded the sword of rebellion against the powers ordained of God. But, has your demeanour, as subjects, been always consistent with the will of him, by whom they are ordained? You have not incurred the penalties of human laws, against the factious and seditious. But, have you, for conscience-sake, avoided the approach to those sins, which "the presumptuous and self-willed" have dignified with the name of virtues. You have not been noisy and clamorous for pretended privileges. But, have you, in compliance with an authority, which no man can resist, studied to be quiet, and to do your own business? You have never assaulted the skies with curses. But, have you never used the language of those that forget God? Have you never swelled your account by wanton, malicious, and reproachful, words? You have spoiled none by violence: it is well. But, have you defrauded no man? Have you never eaten the bread of deceit; perhaps, of perjury; and increased your stores by the wages of transgression? Perhaps, God has given you riches and wealth, and placed you above mean temptations. You shake your

hands from holding of bribes ; but, are you equal proof against more secret, more disguised, more specious, trials ? Have you never preferred a compliance with the world, to the severe demands of duty ; and the solicitations of worldly favour, to the glory of your God ?

Brethren, lay your hands upon your hearts ; or rather, bring your hearts to these important inquiries, and plead no more a conscience without offence. Plead rather for mercy, and betake yourselves to the appointed refuge. Nor trust to the most pungent present sorrow, whilst you put off repentance to some future day. For why should you leave that work unfinished, even for a moment, which, if one moment prevents, will remain unfinished for ever. Abhor, then, the thought of making sin and repentance consistent. Imagine not that *that* sorrow, which only disturbs, but does not prevent its commission, will lead to repentance, not to be repented of. On the contrary, it will hereafter sharpen your pangs of remorse, that you so often sorrowed to no purpose, when you will be forced to put your repentance amongst your catalogue of sins.

Perhaps, you soothe your expectations, that a death-bed will pay off your reckoning
at

at once, while you, in the mean time, increase the score in thoughtless security. But are you certain that you will, at death, have it in your power to repent more effectually than before? Would you have death work miracles? It often strikes, and gives no notice; and when it does, conscience is not always found to act in compliance with its warnings. It is a very common case, that a long habit of sinning, without remorse, produces an obduracy in the conscience, not to be overcome by the most pressing admonitions, and even death itself,

But, should conscience, then, become a troublesome monitor, the same arts, which silenced it before, are often employed with success at the last extremity. When danger threatens, and death alarms, it is natural for men to catch at every glimpse of comfort, to support the sinking spirit, often when it has no other ground, than what ignorance and superstition give it. We are told by historians, that Lewis XI. king of France, was so terrified with the approach of death, that, in his last, lingering illness, he meanly bribed his physicians, that they might flatter him with
the

the hopes of recovery, and give the clamours of his conscience a little respite.

It must, indeed, be owned, that a sense of guilt, in a dying hour, is sometimes too strong for delusion, and refuses comfort. Terrors, silenced in health, renew their attack, and become more loud and importunate. So that the burdened soul is desirous to shake them off, and cannot. Warnings slighted, mercies rejected, love despised, pierce it through with many arrows. And to complete the scene, who knows, but temptations to habitual and beloved sins, may, even then, like the fiends of darkness, hover over the departing soul, whilst the thoughts of what it leaves, and what it forebodes, unite in making it completely wretched. Call not this severe: God forbid that I should set before you imaginary terrors. The reality is too full of horror to require the aid of any heightened colouring. My only aim is to convince you, more effectually, of the folly of any substitution to a real change of heart, and of stopping short, before you have attained a solid ground of comfort.

Men,

Men, and brethren, what excuse can we have for not attending to him that speaketh? If Ahab listened to the voice of a prophet, much more ought we to the voice of the Son of God. If he mourned for temporal evils, much more ought we at the prospect of eternal woes. There is no occasion for a personal address. Christ speaks to all: all should hear, and obey. All should be as attentive, as if his words were directed to each individual. All we, like sheep, have gone astray. He is the "true shepherd," and invites us to wander no more, but return to the fold of security. What hath he not done to reconcile us to God? He died once, but lives for ever to crown the work his love began. Let not, then, love, despised, aggravate our sins. Let it not awake us to slavish fears, and never excite us to the most amiable and generous affections. What pity is it, that any should feel its influence only in the severity of their doom, and never enjoy its blooming smiles, and unfading glory!

But, lastly, if, then, mere sorrow often fails of salvation, where shall the thoughtless and impenitent appear? If they that mourn for sin, yet suffer for it, how shall they, that
glory

glory in it, escape? If they that believe, and tremble at the threatnings denounced, fall short of salvation, ten-fold indignation shall overtake the scorner, and the unbeliever. If men will hereafter repent of their having repented so ineffectually, what agonies must overtake those, who obstinately persist in a course of sin, till death and judgment stop their career? May, then, every one that has been lost in transgression, return from his evil ways, and cry out, in the language of true penitents,—“ I have sinned, what shall I do unto thee, O thou preserver of men? I feel the weight of mine offences. O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive, Wash me, through the atonement of Christ, and I shall be clean; clothe me with his robe of love, and I shall be whiter than snow. Turn thou thy face from my sins, and put out all my misdeeds, Make me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy holy spirit from me. Oh! give me the comfort of thy help again, and stablish me with thy free spirit.”

Now to God the Father, God the Son, &c.

SERMON XVII.

THE SERVANT ONESIMUS.

PHILEMON II.

*Which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but
now profitable to thee and to me.*

THIS was Onesimus, servant to Philemon, who, having defrauded his master, and left his service, had been converted by St. Paul. He is, therefore, sent back to his master, with this commendatory letter, intreating him to forgive his faults, and receive him again, not now as a servant only, but a brother beloved. Among other arguments, used by the Apostle, this is one, that whereas, in time past, he had been unfaithful and injurious, yet *now* there was so great a change wrought in his disposition, that as he had ministered to the Apostle in *his* bonds, so he was ready to return to his duty, and promote his

his master's interest, for conscience-sake. This amendment in Onesimus was produced, when he embraced the Gospel of Christ, whose voice calls men from the death of sin; and through whose spirit, they attain to a renewed life and gracious disposition. Without his enlivening energy, no natural means would, of themselves, have been sufficient to work so extraordinary a change, all our faculties partaking of that common weakness, into which our nature is fallen; nor is outward discipline alone more effectual to produce the fruits of grace. Man, like a diligent husbandman, may sow the good seed in the breasts of others, and recommend religion by his own bright example. But it is God alone, that perfects the blessing, and brings the christian harvest to maturity.

We may, perhaps, illustrate this truth from this very Onesimus, who is mentioned in the text. Doubtless, his master Philemon had not been wanting to instruct, and edify, his household, in the way of salvation. Was this care altogether lost? It was certainly ungratefully repaid; and it might have hardened the conscience of this faithless fugitive, had he not been brought back by the ministry of Paul;

Paul; when he became a profitable member of that family, in which *before* he was unworthy to abide.

But I hasten to the substance of this discourse, in which I shall endeavour to shew, first, the unprofitableness of servants without religion; and, secondly, the usefulness of those, who perform their duty, under the influence of it.

First, it is an indisputable maxim, that God having placed servants in a peculiar relation to their masters, conscience towards him is the only ground of their discharging that relation, with fidelity. Since this is the strongest test, which the one can give, or the other require, if this be wanting, weaker obligations will, and must be, broken through. For, can we imagine, that those servants duly regard the service of an earthly master, when they serve not their heavenly Lord, for whose glory they were created, by whose hand they are preserved, and into whose family they are called to be heirs of an eternal kingdom? If they are *not* drawn by the constraint of his powerful love, they are dead to every generous principle; alive only to base desires, and selfish

6 passions,

passions, which *will* interfere with their duty, as often as they are called forth by opportunity and temptation.

You will allow, that a regard to the master's interest is a necessary qualification in a servant. But where is the security, for this regard, from him, who lives not in the fear of God, whenever his own interest interferes? The inferior motives of the world may preserve him from open dishonesty, but will be no safeguard against disingenuous dealing, against secret frauds. He will regard his master's welfare with eye-service, neglect occasions to advance it, and, when unseen, expose it to manifest hazard. Though his own interest should coincide with that of his master, for the present; yet, whenever circumstances change, it will appear that his seeming fidelity sprang from a selfish heart. He will, then, be unthrifty, when unthriftiness opposes no fordid passion of his own, and carelessly waste what he took no care to be faithful in getting.

Another branch of the unfaithfulness of servants is improvidence of their time. Time is a sacred talent derived from God, to be
employed

employed in a manner suitable to the station, in which he has placed us. Those servants, therefore, who pay no regard to God, as the sovereign owner of their *whole* time, will neglect to improve that *part* of it, which he has commanded them to bestow, for the benefit of their masters. Their own indolence will, then, usurp the place of conscience; they will catch at every opportunity, that is favourable to their case; and, though they are paid the wages due to industry, will think it no robbery, occasionally, to eat the bread of sloth. But a robbery, doubtless, it is; because they cannot deprive their masters of the service of their time, but they deprive them also of their substance; a crime, the most enormous, since it is attended with breach of fidelity, and ingratitude, both to God and man.

Exceedingly various are the workings of our corrupted nature. The passions, and the humour, of wicked servants, will likewise put in a claim for indulgence. For instance; they that have no true reverence for God, will have no just reverence for their masters, on whom he has laid his honour. Hence arises that sullen, undutiful spirit, which every occasion will call forth. In

direct opposition to the Apostle's rule,—“ answering not again,” they will often reply with bitterness to the mildest reproofs; and even, when not reprov'd, will indulge a licentious tongue. For these enormities, religion would be a sovereign cure,—that divine teacher, which makes us know ourselves, and know our station. When that is disregarded, all other remedies are vain. Human laws cannot bestow an humble mind, nor give inward reverence, either towards God or man. Indeed, opulence, and superior station, may, in some degree, check the fallies of an undutiful spirit; yet, in a country of liberty, like our's, licentiousness will always be the companion of impiety, and trample upon duty, whenever it is unsupported.

Hence it is, that irreligious servants will often shew disobedience to the justest commands of their masters. God says,—“ Servants, obey your masters in all things;” that is, in all things that are lawful. But this injunction is disregarded, when the measure of obedience is not directed by the fear of God. Should any idle, or vicious, inclination, intervene, obedience is no more; or, at least, paid with murmuring, and reluctance. Is it not particularly

cularly so, when masters give such injunctions to their servants, as do not directly coincide with their accustomed labours?—especially, whenever they offer to direct their outward deportment on the Lord's day? For, so long as they continue ignorant of God, they will esteem the hours of christian worship to be their own, and such directions to arise from a pretended and assumed authority.

Secondly; let us turn our eyes to a more pleasing prospect, and behold the happy effects religion produces in the behaviour of servants. In the first place, it secures their fidelity, because, being animated by the love of God, they esteem themselves the servants of Christ, and, therefore, serve *him* in the person of their masters. Whatever they do, it is their privilege to do in his name, and for his sake; so that good-will, rooted in the heart, directs, and animates, their labours. For whatever is committed to their hands, by their earthly masters, they deem themselves accountable to their heavenly Lord; assured of this, that as he will chastise them, for betraying the confidence reposed in them, though ever so secretly, so he has dignified their humble calling, by promising that no at-

tempt to glorify his name, even in the meanest of his servants, shall ever lose its reward.

Such will not be content with giving eye-service; because, though their masters be absent, they know that God is ever present, and his eyes beholding the evil, and the good. They cannot "be slothful in business," because they labour for God; they cannot be wasteful of their time, because they esteem it *his* property, and redeem it, as those that are hastening to the mansions of eternity.

Further; the authority of the master is secure, in the eye of a religious servant. He knows this reverence to be due, not because his master is wealthy, or great, or wise, or generous, but merely because he is his master. He will, therefore, take no advantage of his poverty, or weakness, to treat him with contempt. He will not deprive him of his regard, even though he should want those abilities which he himself enjoys. He will, for conscience towards God, overlook his defects, bear with his infirmities, and be subject, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward.

Besides,

Besides, the passions of a christian servant are in subjection to the law of Christ; and he is endowed with that meek and quiet spirit, which is a peculiar ornament to a low station, at the same time that it is the distinguishing glory of christianity. To what is it owing, but to the tyranny of self-will, that men cannot bear the hardships of their lot, and give way to murmurings, disputings, and discontent? It is this, which makes the yoke of servitude a galling yoke, even in a land of liberty; and without *this*, even slavery would be enabled to assert an inward freedom. However, the truly pious servant will check the first risings of impatience. Since he cannot be wholly exempt from trials, he will endeavour to improve them, and make them instrumental to his growth, in humility: therefore, he will obey without reluctance; not treating with indifference even the inferior part of his duty, nor heedlessly forgetting the slightest commands of his master.

Need I take pains to prove, that God will bless the labours of such a servant? You have read of the piety of Eliezer,—the blessing of Jacob,—the fidelity of Joseph; and you know, in all these instances, it was God that gave

success to their diligence. This is his invariable rule,—to “honour those that honour him,” to hear their prayers, to send his angels to watch round about them, and take under his immediate protection all those, though of the lowest station, who commit their way, and their work, to him.

The inferences I shall draw from these considerations are very obvious. They relate both to masters, and to servants. You, then, who are masters, are hereby powerfully called upon, since it is your own welfare that calls you, to promote the honour of religion in your households, to be the patterns of every good work; and, with all kindness and goodwill, to contribute to the supply both of their natural and spiritual wants. Should the blessing of God attend your endeavours, at the same time that you will exalt *them* to be your brethren, you will make them your friends, and servants, in the Lord. They will repay you here, and bless you hereafter.

Let not, then, my dear brethren, an attachment to the world, through the lust of gain, defeat its own ends. What, though it often happens, that much earthly good arises from

from unhallowed labours? Look forward to future worlds; consider what the balance of your profit, and loss, will be, on that solemn day, when you will give an account of your behaviour, as christian householders, at the judgement-seat of Christ. *Then*, if you have been faithful in the work of God, you will receive a reward, which will be given you, not according to your success, but the diligence you have used; though, indeed, it will be adding to the glories of your crown, that you have been instruments in enlarging the number of the blessed. But, should it then appear, that your diligence was confined to this present world alone, that you did not attempt to be rich towards God, your gain will be found to be real loss, and you, yourselves, convicted of having abused the privileges of that Gospel, of which you now make a vain profession. Let not, then, your own domestics accuse you, that you let them perish in their ignorance; or, by your own example, shewed them the way to ruin, when you ought to have gone before them in instruction, and every good work.

Remember, my brethren, that, as you have a christian calling, you should not be regulated

by worldly maxims alone. The scope, at which you should aim, should not be a conformity with the customs of the world. The christian commonwealth is to be united by christian bonds; and Christ, our head, requires all our relations to be fulfilled, that we may be the real members of his mystical body, and be owned, as such, at the last day, before men and angels.

But, even in this world, the ill effects of family irreligion are often experienced. In the metropolis, masters of families are much degenerated from their old sobriety and good behaviour. In the early times, after the reformation, almost every house-holder, both in London and the country, walked before his family to his parish-church. But, now, those very families, which are kept together by business, on the week days, are, on the Lord's days, dispersed, like sheep that have no shepherd, where humour, or where pleasure, calls. The master, too often, beholds this, with indifference, if not with approbation. And this, I fear, is one grand promoter, as well as fatal consequence, of that astonishing licentiousness, both civil and religious, which, in these present days, hath loosened, and almost destroyed

destroyed every bond of relative duty and obedience.

As for you, my brethren, who are servants, receive this friendly admonition. Bring yourselves to the test of that Gospel, to which you must, at the last, be brought. Examine yourselves by this rule. Perhaps, you pretend to a character for being faithful to your masters. Does your fidelity proceed from this conviction, that you are the servants of Christ?—and, are you led, by his spirit, to serve your masters, for God's sake? If not, your service is no act of duty towards him. But without this, no diligence will avail; no personal regard for your earthly superiors will be accounted of. For you serve not God, but yourselves; and, therefore, as you want the true principle of obedience, it is not such as God will reward.

Others, again, may lay high claims to religion, and, indeed, such there are, but pay little, or no regard, to their master's welfare. This pretence is also vain. The best evidence of your attainment, in your christian calling, is your good behaviour in your particular calling. Otherwise, your religion would be

be only a mere opinion, and profession, destitute of life. A little knowledge will make you conceited; self-opinion will, perhaps, make you insolent; false zeal will fill you with contempt of your masters. But, when true religion enters into your souls, it will cloathe you with humility; adorn you with meekness, patience, submission, obedience, and all other christian virtues, necessary to prove you the disciples of Christ.

Others there are, among you, and I fear a great majority, who are openly, and avowedly, both disobedient to God, and unprofitable to your masters; and so far, my brethren, you are consistent. But, what then, do you applaud yourselves for breaking through these bonds of your duty? There can be no dignity, in being the slaves of sin; there is no freedom, but in subjection to Christ. The true *rights of man* are not to be attained, but through the duties of man. Those, who pretend to liberty on any other ground, are neither capable of christian freedom, nor able to avoid the bonds of the most abject thralldom. What, though human laws, in this land of ours, are not rigorous in punishing the offences of the licentious? "Be sure your sin will find you out;" and

and that God will judge you, not according to the maxims established here, but his own righteous Gospel. If you despise the authority of your masters, can you despise God, your maker?—Or, will you retain your confidence, when you stand before his judgment-seat, and the ministers of vengeance are ready to hurl you into perdition? If, then, you are profitable to none, you are most unprofitable to yourselves; and neither the Gospel, nor the love of Christ; neither things present, nor things to come, can keep you from utter ruin. O may these considerations awaken as many of you as have not considered aright, that so, through God's mercy, *you*, like Onesimus, may be engrafted into the living stock, and bring forth fruit unto life eternal!

To God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, let us give all honour, and obedience, now, and for evermore.

SERMON XVIII.

FAMILY RELIGION.

GENESIS xviii. 19.

For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord to do justice and judgment, that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.

THE testimony, which God bears to his people, through his spirit, of the sincerity of their hearts in secrecy and silence, is here given to Abraham in a public manner. "For I know him that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord to do justice and judgment, that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him." How glorious is this approbation, since it proceeds from him, who is both an unerring judge, and an omnipotent rewarder ;
and

and therefore far more desirable than the applauses of the whole world. The character, here so honourably mentioned, is that of a religious master of a family: the reward annexed to it is that of making him a great nation, the blessings of which were in due time to be extended to all the families of the earth. The character, perhaps, may not appear great in the eyes of the world; yet it is highly esteemed in the sight of God, and certainly entitles all, who walk in the steps of Abraham, to some part of the same regard. So that the meanest christian householder has an opportunity given him of cultivating, and improving, the same divine friendship here below; and after this life, the invaluable privilege of sitting down with Abraham in the kingdom of God.

Give me leave, therefore, my brethren, to recommend to you the great, but neglected duty of family religion. But it will be necessary, first of all, to shew wherein it consists. It is in general the exercise of the same faith in private walls, which is taught in the church of God. The Apostle St. Paul often greets the householders of believers, under the name of churches; which is an intimation to

us of their order and regulation, and of our own duty. This appellation cannot but teach us, that that divine consecration, which is the peculiar characteristic of every true member of Christ's church, should exert its sacred influence in our domestic retirements, and that we should continue to offer up with our families those spiritual sacrifices, which are essential to our christian calling, and make us acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. The proper regulation of this belongs to the master, or director of the household. For he receives by his station a certain authority over those, of whom it consists, which he must use, not only as a conscientious member of society, but as one, who belongs himself to a superior household, the family of God. So that christianity has enlarged his sphere of economical duties, by joining with them whatever tends to advance the kingdom of God, and extends the interests of the Redeemer.

Herein it seems principally requisite, that he instruct his family in the principles, and duties, of our most holy faith. For we may almost as well call a wild indian clan part of the church of God, as that family, the members of which have no other evidence for their
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christianity, than that they have been baptized. Experience convinces us, that children may grow up in a christian neighbourhood, and yet be involved in heathenish darkness. Every householder, then, is bound to bring up his own domestics "in the nurture of the Lord," and feed them with the sincere milk of the word; that, with the divine blessing, they may grow thereby, till they arrive at the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. Children should be taught, in their very infancy, to desire this heavenly food, that the life of grace in the soul may accompany the growth of the body; lest the corruptions of nature, not being resisted, should at length produce a total insensibility and disrelish to the things of God. For this reason, parents should not only give light to the very dawnings of their children's understanding, but familiarize them as they increase in years to heavenly truths, and use diligence and zeal in the pious task. God says to the children of Israel not only,—“these words, which I command thee, shall be in thine heart,” but also, “thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way; when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.” Servants have, indeed, passed
their

their infancy, the properest season of cultivation, in other dwellings. But, alas! most of these are but children in christian knowledge, and too often worse than children, through the habits of a neglected education. They claim, therefore, no small part of their master's care, in dispelling their ignorance, and rectifying their manners. A real regard for their welfare, joined with prudence, will both enable him to find out the best means of pursuing this, and be most instrumental in promoting it.

In these domestic instructions, the word of God must be the rule, and, therefore, should be read in our houses, every convenient opportunity. There, we are taught the miseries of our nature, and the blessings of redemption; we are commanded to renounce our sins, to apply to Christ as the healer of all our maladies; to listen to his prophetic voice; to obey the dictates of his spirit. Can we, then, hide these necessary truths from our own families? Shall God reveal himself to his church, and shall the members of it, who profess the christian faith, not think it worthy to be imparted to their own relatives? None are too high for this pious office; for what is grandeur,

dear, unless it be ennobled by christian love? None are too low, I had almost said too ignorant, if they are hearty in the work of God. If they are not incapable of reading, the poorest may find a blessed opportunity for enriching souls, with the treasures of the gospel. Should they not have been taught to read, if they are sincere, they will be more diligent in drawing from other sources of instruction, that they may communicate it to others, which consists not in nice disquisitions, but in plain and universal truths.

But the duty of the master or mistress of a family ends not in mere instruction. The pious householder will call down a blessing from the Lord, upon his endeavours, by prayer and supplication. Devotion is the soul of religion, as well in families as in individuals. Its flame must be greatly increased, when they glorify God with united fervours. Besides, domestic mercies require suitable acknowledgments; and therefore the master of a family, under a sense of being blessed by God, will not be content with a solitary devotion, but will make, within his own walls, the outgoings of the morning, and evening, to praise his great Benefactor.

One day in seven, we are more particularly obliged to rest from the labours of our calling, that we may the more diligently attend upon religious duties. And, herein, we know but little of the power of godliness, if we imagine that the Lord's day is to be hallowed only in the church, whilst there is no appearance of it in our families at home, but that of unsanctified rest, and stupid indolence. True piety requires that we dedicate it wholly to the honour of God, not doing in any part of it our own ways, not finding our own pleasure, not speaking our own words; and true wisdom will enable us to shew, that we are fully sensible of the end of its consecration, and the necessity of redeeming time. Actuated by this spirit, we shall want no other inducement to oblige our families to attend the church, on the Lord's day. We shall not rob them of the inestimable privilege of meeting their Saviour in his own house, for the sake of some unnecessary business, or trivial convenience. Nor shall we see them indisposed, even for the outward appearance of religion, and presumptuously indulging a base idleness at home, and not warn them of their guilt, and rouse them from their fatal security.

Need

Need I inform you, my brethren, that you must have some taste for pure religion, before you can fulfil such duties as these? Indeed, if you are not actuated by a lively faith, you will find yourselves indisposed to undertake them. Nay, if your own life is unholy, your example bad, your best instructions must be in vain, and come very ungracefully from an ungracious mouth; and your prayers, if you pray at all, will condemn your practice. Pious example, therefore, is a necessary ingredient in family religion; and an ungodly life, by disabling men from performing this grand duty, appears to be a monster, teeming with innumerable evils. In many, it produces an insensibility of conscience, even in the daily and constant omissions of religious offices. So that, though they never think upon God, they bless themselves in their hearts, and expect a blessing from above. They enjoy the comforts, which their condition allots them, and hope to be happy hereafter.

Let us, therefore, endeavour to rouse their consciences by urging the obligation and necessity of family duties. And, here, mere nature-teaches us, that the worship of God is due from every family, as an acknowledge-

ment of his overflowing goodness. Indeed, there are no families, which have not received some peculiar blessings from God's bounty, and daily protection; and shall they pay no returns for these? Shall they hide his beneficence in their hearts, and perhaps not be sensible of it there? Shall there be no more signs of religion in their houses, than if they owed all to their own policy and labours, nothing to divine Providence? Their very tables must upbraid their ingratitude; and every morning, which rises upon them with renewed mercies, must reproach them with proclaiming, that their time, with all its blessings, is the unmerited gift of the sovereign provider. Nor will it be sufficient to pay him a formal homage, the thanksgiving of the lips; they must shew their gratitude, by their lives, and sanctify the daily bounties of God, by the daily offering of a devoted heart. Otherwise, they will be converted into a curse, by their own unthankfulness.

Let us also reflect, that, as Christians, we are bound to shew forth his praises, who hath called us into his marvellous light. If those, who pretend to be his disciples, live in their families, as the children of this world, they do

great dishonour to their profession. For men may well ask, where is the efficacy of that religion, which pretends to make its converts new creatures, to take off their affections from this world, and admit them to communion with God through Christ? Is there a man, who regards the honour of his Saviour, that is not desirous of refuting such a charge as this? There is no other way of doing it, than by an exemplary conduct in our families, and shewing the power of religion *there*, where men seldom put on the mask. Indeed, a true faith is alway attended by a prudent zeal for his service; so that every parent, or master, who is possessed of it, naturally exerts it within his domestic sphere, by shewing his own improvement, in displaying the love of God, and recommending his gospel by the persuasive topics it affords. This is a conversation becoming the religion we profess, and the true effect of that wisdom, which is justified of all her children.

There is a duty likewise owing to souls. In every householder bound to give those committed to his care, whatever is just and equal?—He is obliged to relieve their spiritual, as well as bodily necessities. The body stands not more

in need of convenient sustenance, than the soul of religious nurture. Will you then be so injurious, as to provide only for the perishable frame of your nearest relatives, perhaps the dearest parts of yourselves? Will you give no more to your offspring, than the brutes to their's? Will you do no more for your servants, than for your dogs and horses?—for, to these, you allow such food and shelter as is suitable to their natures. Human laws, as well as your own interest, oblige you thus far. Will the laws of humanity not influence you at all? Do you affect the name of tender parents, and benevolent masters? Is it not barbarity itself, instead of checking the corrupt nature of your dependants, by sober admonition, and directing them to those remedies and helps, which the Saviour of the world administers, to give it its full career, till it ends in torments insupportable to all eternity?

Can you, then, omit these necessary duties, and yet be guiltless? The authority, which Providence has given you over your families, is a talent committed to your charge. If you use this conscientiously, it affords you an opportunity of the noblest good; if you abuse it, it becomes the more destructive, in proportion

portion to its high importance; and should you continue to misemploy it, the abuse can neither be remedied, nor retrieved, for ever. What is the voice of daily experience? It informs us, that there are few servants, who are influenced by any other than domestic authority, especially in great and opulent families. Disobedient to magistrates, regardless of their teachers, except perhaps at the instant of instruction, forgetful of their maker, your servants scarce own any superior, but you, who are their masters. Should you, then, refuse to exert your influence, what wonder is it, that your houses are the nurseries of ignorance, the schools of vice, insolence, and folly. Shall you not, then, account for this, to the owner of these souls; and, of whose hands, but yours, will God require them? Oh, who can tell the bitterness of that remorse, when they themselves shall testify against you; and accuse you as the authors of their ruin? Lay not up, then, in store, an addition to your own guilt; accumulate not woes on that burden, from crimes not your own. But, warned by these alarming truths, make a wise improvement of your talents, as householders that wait for your Lord's coming, and good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

The advantages and blessings, which will result from hence, are great and important. Family religion has a direct tendency to make every member of the household serious and holy. For, it is the setting God alway before our families, and making them daily sensible of their dependance on his providence. The edge of the carnal and worldly affections will through this be abated; their relish for spiritual enjoyments will be increased; and their souls be inured, by devotion, to converse with God and heaven. The great mysteries of redemption will hereby be rendered familiar, for they will be daily recounted; and, as they are peculiarly adapted to raise our love and admiration, we shall attain a higher sense of the value of salvation, as the unmerited gratuitous gift of God. Nor will the Holy Spirit be wanting to assist, and bless, a religious household. He is invited, and he will come and reside with them, and give them a constant communication of his graces. Through him, their faith will be daily renewed, their hopes enlivened, and their zeal preserved continually burning. What an encouragement will the members of such a household have to grow in grace, and press towards the mark of their high calling, when they are witnesses

of its power, and its fruit.

portion

to each others vows, and animated by mutual example, and mutual love! And what delightful satisfaction must it give to a master, who regulates such a family as this, to observe the work of God to prosper in his hands, and growing up, under his protection, to a due maturity!—to behold his children and servants dutiful and obedient, and, even in this life, paying him some recompense for his affection!

This, my brethren, is a short representation of the good effects of a well regulated family; and if you find not these fruits in your own, examine whether you yourselves behave as those, that know you have a master in heaven. You complain of bad servants, with great truth. But lay your hands upon your hearts; have you seriously endeavoured to make them better? You have admonished them, perhaps, of their idleness, their disrespect, their profusion, their unfaithfulness. But, have you not passed over their irreligion, the root of these disorders, and scarce vouchsafed it one lukewarm reproof? At best, have you not been content with an inattention to yourselves, without enquiring whether they do serve the eye of their great Master, and build their

their service upon its true foundation. If so, you are alike unfaithful to your common Lord, and have no title to complain, that you enjoy not, in your families, the effects of that religion, you do not inculcate. You may as well expect labour from them, without giving them convenient sustenance, as conscience in their duty, if they are destitute of the word of life. After all, there will be some servants, and even children, so disingenuous, that neither example, nor exhortation, can move them. And, though it be discouraging to parents, and masters, to cultivate such barren rocks as these, let them remember that God requires the labour, and takes the event into his own hands, and be assured that the seed which they have sown though it produce no fruit in stony hearts, will spring up in themselves, and bring forth an abundant increase. You have admonished their minds of their blindness, their distemper, their need. I use any other arguments with you, need I tell you after this, that Religion, in your families, will bless your labours with success. You see, in the text, that the care of Abraham recommended his children, and his household, after him, to keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment, is the very reason

reason given, why God intended to separate him from the idolatrous world, and make of him a great and mighty nation. And though every private Christian, who imitates the faithful patriarch, can have no title to expect so signal a regard, yet he may so far apply the divine promise to himself, as to hope assuredly to draw down a blessing, from the Lord, upon himself and his posterity. The worship of God established in his family, will be like the ark of God in his house; and every thing, he is possessed of, will be under the protection of the divine presence. Though he should enjoy no superfluous stores, and the riches of this life, yet he will enjoy what is far better than riches, tranquillity, contentment, sweet peace of mind, and the sense of the divine favour. *Christ. Let us glory in it, and in nothing but* But, after all, his full reward he receives not here. The crown of his pious labours is laid up for him, in the mansions of bliss. *Ps. 136.* They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever." Every citizen, he brings to the heavenly Sion, will be an additional jewel in his crown. Nay, not one of the devout exercises of him, and his family, will be lost in the kingdom of God;

God; but will be preserved in that book of remembrance, that is written before him, for "those that feared the Lord, and thought upon his name." Whilst he lives below, his household may be called a sacred nursery for heaven. Their present delightful task will be there continued, with unrestrained vigour; their union with Christ will be there completed in a perfect fruition of him; and their united prayers, which are offered here, will be there exalted to a full and universal harmony.

May these considerations sink deep into our minds, and melt our frozen hearts into an active zeal, for Christ and his religion! Let us no longer be content with the name of Christians, nor ashamed of the Gospel of Christ. Let us glory in it, and in nothing besides it. Let our families be witnesses and examples of its power, that, inflamed with the same heavenly spirit, they may follow us, with united triumphs, into the Kingdom of God.

To God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, be ascribed all glory and praise, in every assembly of the saints, now, and for evermore.

God;

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SERMON XIX.

WISDOM AND INNOCENCE.

MATT. X. 16.

Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye, therefore, wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.

THIS is part of the charge of our blessed Lord to his disciples, when he sent them forth to preach. They were persons inconsiderable for their number, unskilled in the arts of policy, and destitute of carnal weapons. But they were going to be exposed to the dangers of an inhospitable world, and encounter the pride and malice of evil men, who are here called wolves. For, when men's passions are let loose from the restraints of conscience, all other prohibitions are insufficient to retain them within the limits of equity and justice. Self is craving, and importunate.

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The malevolence of the heart wants nothing but a safe and plausible opportunity to shew itself in action. And, therefore, wicked men scruple not, to make a prey of those, who are unable to resist, or avenge, themselves. These first preachers of the Gospel would also raise the indignation of sinners against them, since they proclaimed repentance, and the approach of God's kingdom. Their divine master, foreseeing how the world would be affected towards them, sends them to learn a lesson of the brute creation,—“Be ye wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.” The good qualities of each of these creatures, the Apostles were to imitate; the venom of the one, the timidity of the other, they were to avoid. But the union of wisdom, and innocence, must contribute both to protect their persons from danger, and give authority, and influence, to the doctrines they were to inculcate.

If this admonition was expedient for the Apostles, it belongs also to the ministers of religion, who succeed to their labours and difficulties, in all ages of the world. I am not, however, speaking to them, but to Christians in general. I shall, therefore, apply the subject of this discourse to every man, who bears the
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christian character; to every man among you, my brethren, who knows the excellence of his calling, and is desirous that no man should take his crown, or rob it of its jewels. You live not, indeed, amongst heathen persecutors; but you live in an evil world:—you live amongst false friends, and nominal professors:—you live amongst those, who, by their infidelity, and impiety, disown the church that fed them; dishonour the Saviour that bought them; and are enemies to the true disciples of Christ.

In considering the doctrine of the text, I shall, first, take a view of the mischiefs occasioned by the want of prudence in Christians; secondly, of the great evils arising from the want of innocence, in the wise men of the world; and, thirdly, of the benefits that result from being, at the same time, “wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.”

And, first, men of good meaning, without good discretion, are often exposed to the various methods of delusion, which are practised by the artful and designing. Genuine goodness is so excellent, that they who have it not, are sometimes forced to affect it. Whilst many, by forming loud pretensions to a chris-

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tian character, hide from others, perhaps from themselves, their real depravity. They have rung, so long, their own praises, that they believe their own lye. If they thus deceive themselves, well may they deceive others also; especially those, whose unsuspecting temper makes them an easy prey. But, when once the impostures of cunning men have gained admittance into their hearts, their own attachments will, at length, make them blind to the grossest delusions. The next step will be to promote the schemes of hypocrites, and give credit, by their names, to those, who have no credit of their own. Thus it is, that men, originally of upright meanings, unless directed by discretion, will, at length, be brought to wrong, and injurious, acting. This is agreeable to the progressive nature of the human mind; one delusion begets another, till, at length, it becomes bewildered in error and darkness. So true is the observation of the wise king,—“It is the prudence of a man to understand his way, and the folly of fools is deceit.”

As imprudent Christians fall a sacrifice to treachery, so are they exposed to the attack of open villainy. Religion is the hatred of wicked men; when they assault it, it is with virulence. “They watch my steps,” says

says David, "when they wait for my soul." When they find the Christian, therefore, unguarded by discretion, he has lost his defence, and falls without pity.

But, want of discretion, in pious men, produces still greater evils than these. Religion is frequently injured, not only by the vices, but the imprudence of its professors. Indeed, open sins are known, by all, to be inconsistent with every profession. But the little failures of an indiscreet character are often blended; by the world, with the very substance of religion. Men, who overlook the grossest sins, in themselves, will descry, and magnify, the slightest offences in others; and triumph, with insolence, when there is the least foundation for calumny. Hence, religion is often wounded in the house of its friends; the great author of it traduced; and both his doctrines, and precepts, vilified by licentious tongues. A zeal, without knowledge, in the best of causes, often does more mischief than the attacks of an enemy. Whilst it makes proselytes of some, to an adulterated faith, it makes more indifferent to genuine truths. The graces of sincere Christians are confounded with the bold claims of enthusiasts; and

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sanctity itself, the offspring of heaven, becomes a term of general reproach, because it has sometimes been assumed by those who were strangers to its power.

Secondly; if piety, without prudence, is often hurtful; cunning, without innocence, is entirely contradictory to the Gospel. I need not inform you, that there are great numbers of men, the whole of whose attainments consists in a specious outside. Artful, in supporting a character, they seek to excel in popular accomplishments; and, though destitute of those qualities of the mind, which, alone, can give a character its worth, and dignity, they often gain the applause of an ill-judging world; and no wonder. The wisdom of the serpent is of a very accommodating nature. It studies the dispositions, and works upon the foibles of mankind. It enables a man to turn every occasion to selfish ends. He makes use of his own reputation, and, where that is wanting, of the reputation of the Gospel, to accomplish his designs. However, the Gospel of Christ condemns his whole system of cunning. Its tendency is to enlarge the mind: it gives a noble simplicity to the behaviour, and uniformity to the conduct. This is that godly sincerity,

sincerity, which makes a man an Israelite indeed. There is no occasion for art, in true piety and benevolence: there is no room for deceit, in a heart that is purified by the love of God. How vain, then, are mere external decorations, and selfish pursuits. The shewy professor may deceive others into an opinion of his goodness, but is incapable of its reality. His cunning will even debase the low virtues he has, and make him entirely averse to the sublimer christian graces. He can have no motive for self-denial, and taking up the cross. If he gives his money, it is without charity; if he has a zeal for God, it is corrupted by the leaven of his own perverseness.

Mean as the end of the worldly wise man is, he is, nevertheless, often defeated of his purpose. His own inconsistency sometimes betrays him. The affectation of virtue deludes the multitude; but the truly wise possess those faculties of discernment, which the world knows not of. These bring every pretension to its proper test, and are most apt to suspect those very claims to sincerity and truth, which extort the applause of fools. The artful man is never secure: in the midst of his successes, he is disappointed. His

schemes are sometimes counteracted by others more artful than himself; and the greater hypocrite finds out, and betrays the lesser. At other times, he falls into the snare he made for others, is duped by his own arts, and becomes, himself, a notorious example, that the wisdom of fools is folly.

But should he succeed in his pursuits, should his triumphs be lasting and unalloyed, who ever was satisfied with such pursuits as his? Ambition is a mere phantom of the mind; favour is deceitful. Riches flow in, and the man is craving for more. He feels uneasiness amidst his enjoyments. If he is an inferior knave, his whole life will be tormented with misgivings. But, should he be superior to these, he has no relish for real happiness. He tastes no benevolence, or friendship. He possesses, but does not enjoy the present; he suspects, and dreads the future. Well may these things be so. He knows not God, the fountain of enjoyment: he experiences not that peace, which springs from a reliance upon his providence. Let the children of the world, then, alone: envy not their most prosperous state. They build their house upon the sand, which every accident may throw down,

down; and which God himself will certainly destroy. The perfection of their art consists in deceiving themselves; and their wisdom, in accomplishing their own ruin. Alas! what pains do they take in weaving the spider's web, and cherishing vipers in their own breast, when the same labour employed for God, would have procured them a good conscience, and what is still more valuable, peace at the last! Blind and foolish men!—were this peace but known, and duly esteemed by you, how would you lothe your wretched choice, acknowledge your deepest craft to be your greatest folly, and anxiously seek that pearl of great price, which would make you rich indeed!

Which brings me, thirdly, to consider the use and efficacy of wisdom and innocence united in the same breast. Wisdom and innocence combined are a preservative against the dangers of our pilgrimage, and enable us to break through all obstructions, in the race that lies before us. The Christian fortified by wisdom, examines before he chooses; and as he prefers the best end, prosecutes it in the best manner. He beholds sin in its various disguises, and sees through them all. When

Satan appears as an angel of light, his piercing eye detects the imposture. He weighs the different enjoyments, which solicit his attention, and considers them not merely with respect to the present moment, but the issues of futurity. Should sinners entice him, he credits not their boasted happiness; should they revile him, he is assured they hurt not him, but themselves. He provokes none by contumely; and when treated wrongfully by others, he repels the injury without malice. Blessed with a single eye, though still liable to err, he escapes dangerous errors. He is enabled to detect the sophistry of false virtues: he distinguishes the offspring of the human passions from those graces, that bear the character of their heavenly Father. He esteems the silent efficacy of genuine religion more than the loudest professions. With respect to acknowledged virtues, he suffers not the inferior to encroach upon the highest: he gives every moral excellence and christian virtue its due place in his esteem, and his conduct. Should any doubts arise in his mind, he asks counsel of God, he consults his word, and abides by the decision of the oracles of truth. In short, he judges not as the world judges, nor acts as the world acts. He considers every talent,

talent, as the deposit of his Lord, who requires him to use it both faithfully and wisely. If God has given him abundance of temporal blessings, he will consecrate his gifts by a liberal distribution; and prudence will direct it. Devotion will raise his spirit to the mansions that are above; but whilst he continues here, he will remember that his earthly tabernacle requires some share of his attention. Thus divinely fortified, affluence will not make him proud, nor poverty discontented. He will not be cast down by suffering, nor elated by success. Should he live among enemies, charity will induce him to bless them that curse him; and prudence, to beware of their malice. Fidelity will engage him to reprove sin; and wisdom, "not to give that which is holy to the dogs, nor cast pearls before swine." He discerns the cause of righteousness, whilst he suffers for it, and equally avoids the extremes of presumption, and a cowardly deflection from his duty.

By such means as these, he both practices the duties of true religion, and consults its honour among men. Indeed, this is what he owes to God and his fellow-creatures. What God has made beautiful, man must not deform

through prejudice and self-conceit. Therefore, the enlightened Christian is not content to be good, he endeavours to adorn goodness, and make it amiable by a prudent and amiable carriage. He is not content to know the failures, that diminish the credit of religion, he studies to avoid them. He walks with a grace, that his virtues may appear graceful to others. He lets his "light shine before men, that they may glorify God," from whence it springs.

Should his example fail of producing its destined effect, in a profligate age, his reward will return into his own bosom. He cannot, perhaps, stop the mouth of calumny, but at the last it will appear as shameless as it is unjust. He cannot avoid the dangers of the world, but he lives above it. Well acquainted that the general lot of Christians is, through much tribulation, to enter into the kingdom of God, he suffers like a Christian, chearfully, and resignedly. Though the world is not his friend, nor the world's law, he is blessed with the friendship of him, who hath overcome the world. Armed with the weapons which he affords him, he presses resolutely forward, till he is become more than

than conqueror, through him that loved him. Then will all the passive virtues cease. Prudence and caution will be no more. In a future life, as the unrighteous shall know no good, so the saints shall know and dread no evil. The clime will be suited to the temper of each: there will be an unpassable gulph between them, and their separation shall endure for ever.

Be patient, therefore, whoever you are, that suffer, till the coming of the Lord. Does the world traduce you?—let not the world justly accuse you. Consider your business here; it is to preserve a conscience void of offence towards God and man: leave the rest to the disposal of your Maker. You are here probationers for the eternal world; you cannot be delivered from the troubles of this, till your probation is ended. This is then the time for the exercise of your virtues. Here you are tried, that you may be purified. The ungodly are likewise tried, and still spared, if so be the goodness and long-suffering of God should bring them to repentance. But when the harvest of the earth is ripe, “God will send his angels to thrust in their sickle, and they shall gather the wheat into his garner, but burn

burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." Then shall be manifest the virtues and patience of the saints. "They shall rest from their labours, and their works shall follow them."

Here, then, my brethren, let all of us sow the seeds of that wisdom, which will produce such a blessed increase. Though the soil be unfavourable, it will amply recompense our labours even in this life; and, in the next, will produce an eternal harvest of joy. So that, at all times, we shall feel the truth of Solomon's panegyric,—“Happy is the man, that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding. For the merchandize of it is better than the merchandize of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies: and all the things thou canst desire, are not to be compared unto her. Length of days is in her right-hand, and in her left-hand riches and honour. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her, and happy is every one that retaineth her.” Is there any thing, in the world, that can come in competition with this? It includes every thing desirable here, and infi-

infinitely more. Make, then, life subservient to wisdom. Be content with such a knowledge of the world, as may teach you to avoid its snares; and such a portion in it, as may lead you on to a better. But remember that it comes from above. Pray, then, for the assistance of that Spirit, whose office it is to teach, to guide, and enlighten your minds. Then will guile, and hypocrisy, and malice fly away: the wisdom of the serpent, and the harmlessness of the dove, will be united within you. You will know the world, and despise it: you will know God, and will love him. You will study the best patterns, and will not be ashamed of those graces, which though disregarded, and even hooted by the world, are essential to the gospel of Christ. And to close the whole, you will follow the steps of your Redeemer, who in the midst of an adulterous generation, lived a blameless life, and, though despised and rejected of men, bore the divine character of the Son of God. The same cross which he bore, the same enemies, the same afflictions, he hath left to you. What then remains, but that the same mind also, and the same affections be in you, which were in him, that you approve yourselves to
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be his disciples, and shine as lights in the
midst of an evil world.

*Now to God the Father, God the Son, and
God the Holy Ghost, be all excellency and per-
fection ascribed, for evermore.*

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wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose." By the wilderness and the desert, we are to understand, by a usual figure in the word of God, the desolation brought upon the world through ignorance and sin; before the entrance of which, at the fall, paradise had flourished in all its beauty. It is, therefore, with peculiar propriety, that that wonderful dispensation of grace, by which the earth was to be restored through Christ, should be represented by the return of fruitfulness and glory.

When man had offended his Maker by disobedience, he was banished from the garden of Eden; and having lost the divine image, lost in *that* his best security and privilege. In consequence of this, the corruption of men quickly appeared. Having a strong party against God in their own breasts, a sense of his presence was forgotten, and the chief guard to virtue was lost. It was either confounded with glory and false ambition, or depraved by the selfish appetites; so that it became defective, both in its principle, and in its end.

But

But, as virtue had lost its dignity, the incentives to vice were in proportion strong. Whatever suited the peculiar corruptions of men was pursued with eagerness, which neither the efforts of philosophy, the restraints of human laws, nor the dictates of natural conscience were able to oppose. True piety was no more; for the objects of men's worship were either nothing in the world, or examples of the same enormities, to which the worshippers were addicted. The popular religion, therefore, instead of mending the morals, either spent itself in unmeaning rites, or contributed to make men more depraved. The vicious practised their vices with allowance, and became treacherous, revengeful, and lascivious, in proportion as they were attached to the deities they adored.

How unpleasant was this state of things! Sin abounded: men felt its evils, but saw not the remedy. Their sorrows had no true alleviation; their calamities no refuge. When their consciences accused them, to which of their gods could they turn for pardon? Like men bewildered in a desert, they wander, and there is no friendly hand to guide them through the waste. They faint, and find no

comforter. The wilderness affords neither springs of living water to refresh the thirsty, nor cheerful shade to shelter the weary. When the storms of life beat on them, they find no cover; when beasts of prey pursue them, to what friendly hand can they fly for safety?

Need I mention how unprofitable was life in this condition? How could the chief good of life be promoted without religion? If men are not good for themselves, they cannot be useful to others. A true sense of the relation they bear to God, is the best security of the great ends of their existence. Where this is wanting, mistaken self occupies its place, man becomes his own idol; and from the very constitution of our nature, where the passions govern, they become destructive, even to their own possessors. The history of the world proves, that the Apostle has not aggravated its character, in which, that of the impenitent Jews is included.—“They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable, there is none that doeth good, no not one. Destruction and misery are in their ways, and the way of peace have they not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes!” It cannot be con-

cluded from hence, that God had no servants even among the heathen world. Some doubtless acknowledged his secret voice, and bore testimony to his goodness, by their gratitude. They made the best use of the light they had, and longed for the dawn of some brighter day.

Whereas those described by the Apostle, whether Jews or Gentiles, were without excuse. Their fault was, they did not like to retain God in their knowledge: their punishment was, they were given over to a reprobate mind. They felt the darkness, which they chose; and their lot was that barrenness, which arose from their own perverseness. But we are further told by the Apostle, that they who have "sinned without law, shall also perish without law; and as many as have sinned in the law, shall be judged by the law." It follows then of course, that that ground, which either produced no fruit, or brings forth thorns and briers, is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned.

Unhappy state of fallen man! How different from the time, when the garden of Eden was his abode, blessed by the divine presence!

As paradise was the temple, in which man conversed with his Creator, and paid him that service, which he accepted, so man himself was the temple of the living God. How innocent his employment, to till the garden, and cultivate the fruits; emblematical these of those dispositions, which he copied from his Creator. But after the fall, when sin entered, the earth became cursed for the sake of man, and scarcely, with the sweat of his brow, produced a recompense for his toils.

When sin was to be done away, and the world restored by Christ, the earth was then to become a paradise again; and, therefore, the Psalmist, upon a view of this glorious event, cries out, in rapture,—“Let the field be joyful, and all that is in it; then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice before the Lord.” The prophet Isaiah frequently uses this allusion in describing it,—“I will plant in the wilderness the cedar, the shittah tree, and the myrtle, and the oil-tree: I will set in the desert the fir-tree, and the pine, and the box-tree together;” and as the waste places were to be made profitable, so the hurtful, and accursed soils, were to be entirely changed. “Instead of the thorn shall

come up the fir-tree; and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle-tree; and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign, which shall not be cut off."

How truly emblematical is this description, will appear by considering the efficacy of this glorious Gospel. In the heathen world, philosophy had done its utmost; the refinements of society took no hold on the morals of men; every species of government had been tried to restrain the disobedient. Yet the virtues had forsaken the earth, and left a desert behind them. The Jews had, indeed, been blessed with the law of Moses, a high privilege, as it was an introduction to a better dispensation. But no law can purify the heart; no law can give strength to the weak affections; no law, as such, can provide a remedy for transgression. However, the law, as a schoolmaster, had its use. It kept the rebellious will under some restraints, and served to convict, and humble, the offending. Its discipline prepared men for freedom; and, therefore, "when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made under the law, that we might receive the end for which it was ordained. Grace, then, and truth, came by Jesus Christ."

Truth was no longer veiled in types and shadows ; and grace was no longer confined to the jewish economy. But the Gospel broke forth with a splendor, as universal as the light of the sun. " Its sound went out into all lands, and its words unto the ends of the world." Wherever it was received, it produced great effects. They who " were sometimes darkness, were now light in the Lord ;"—they, who, before, were unprofitable, were now profitable to themselves, to their masters, to their dependents, to their friends, their neighbours, their enemies. What they derived from mercy, they communicated freely. The love that was shed abroad in their hearts, was not confined there, but diffused itself in its turn : the world, then, began to see disinterested virtue. Wherever the seed was sown, if the soil was kindly, God gave the increase ; for God, who is rich in mercy, having provided such salvation, withholds no means necessary to make it effectual. As his spirit was not wanting, so neither were the most powerful motives. The divine treasures were laid open. The noblest virtues were encouraged with the noblest promises ; and the smallest acts of benevolence were not to lose their reward. Duty was urged upon the conscience, by the
most

most pressing calls; and the example of the great captain of man's salvation was sufficient to form men for the most heroic graces. Their very sufferings were triumphs. Thus, "they that were planted in the house of the Lord, flourished in the courts of the house of our God." As sin had abounded to desolate the earth, so the fruits of the spirit then abounded, and replenished it. Love succeeded to hatred, unity to discord. Savageness fl before meekness; riot, and debauchery, were bound in the chains of temperance. Superstition gave way to piety; and then was fulfilled the prophecy of Malachi,—“From the rising of the sun, even unto the going down of the same, my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered to my name, and a pure offering; for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the Lord of hosts.”

Should it be objected, that much sin still remained; that weeds, and thorns, still sprung up, even in the heritage of God; and that, to this very day, we wait for the restoration of the world. The answer is,—that wherever the religion of Christ is truly embraced, its fruits will be seen; that its efficacy has actually ap-
peared,

peared, in banishing some sins, and disgracing others; in bringing forth to light graces unknown before, and in improving the world in general; and that this improvement will be complete, when the kingdoms of the world are become the kingdoms of Christ. In the mean time, if the christian heritage is still defiled, it is because an enemy hath sowed his tares, which are not to be destroyed till the harvest comes. The grateful soil will justify the care of the divine husbandman; and should the cultivated vineyard bring forth wild grapes, this remonstrance will be unanswerable,—“What more could be done to my vineyard, that I have not done in it?”

But, further, this restoration of the world, by Christ, affords matter both of comfort and of joy to all sincere Christians. His coming had been promised from the beginning, and he himself had been described under the character of a restorer and a deliverer. Therefore, the spiritual Israel waited with anxious expectation for the consolation he was to administer; and, as this was not to be confined to the Jews, but extended to all, he was, therefore, called “the desire of all nations.” When he actually appeared, the love of God was,

was, through him, so wonderfully manifested, and his goodness so conspicuous, as to revive the fainting, and cheer the desponding. For what sorrows of human life did not he provide a remedy? What calamities had not he power to convert into blessings? Did sin accuse? His office was to destroy its tyranny, and avert its punishment. He had a promise for every sincere penitent, an answer for every sincere petitioner; and the blessings conveyed, through him, gave to man an earnest of the most glorious manifestations of divine love. This, therefore, was the request of good old Simeon, at his appearance, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word." And this was the exultation of the spouse of Christ, when wearied with the toils of her pilgrimage, "I sat under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste." *When he entered upon his journey, he said, 'I will go and dwell in the house of the Lord, for he hath heard my voice, and hath accepted my prayer.'*

As the weary are thus refreshed through Christ, so they, who are capable of the most refined joys, through him, relish them most abundantly. As sin is misery, so religion is the truest happiness. A recovery of the divine image, and a restoration to God, brings back paradise to the soul, and makes men

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experience,

experience, within them, the blessedness of the divine presence. The communication between heaven and earth is opened, through which the best gifts are given to man, and the best tribute, that man is able to offer, is returned thither in praise and love. When the desert blossoms abundantly, it rejoices even with joy and singing. So, the more fruitful are men in all piety and virtue, the more susceptible they become of solid happiness. Experiencing this, it is sufficient; living under the protection of their God, they care not to return to broken cisterns, nor try what the wilderness will yield. Their God is their father, their saviour; a God incarnate is their friend. Tidings of great joy were proclaimed at his nativity; and the angels, who best knew the blessedness that was to follow, sang, at that glorious event,—"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will towards men." When he entered upon his ministry, his disciples beheld his glory; the glory as of "the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." Though, to a partial eye, he had no form nor comeliness, his works declared his divine mission, and his inward dignity appeared through the veil of humanity. While he suffered for sinners, and paid

paid our debt, and proved God's acceptance of his ransom, God himself stood forth confessed, being reflected from his face, and appeared infinitely merciful, and infinitely just, "glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders." God converses with man again, no more to be avoided by the conscious criminal, and humble penitent, but to be sought after, entreated, reconciled, and enjoyed. Men, therefore, then, saw the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of their God.

Christ, having procured our pardon, ascended up on high, and hath opened the doors of heaven to all believers. Here, then, is a paradise complete; and if this earthly restoration be so full of comfort, and of joy, what inconceivable bliss will not the heavenly paradise bring forth! How glorious will the new heavens, and the new earth, appear! Into the earthly paradise, delightful as it was, sin once entered. During this state of preparation for glory, alas! how often are we beset with infirmities, and need all the comforts that God himself bestows! But in his own mansions, every curse shall cease. The "pure river of the water of life, clear as chrysal, proceeds out of the throne of God, and of the

the lamb. In the midst is the tree of life," no longer to be withheld, "bearing twelve manner of fruits, yielding her fruit every month, and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations." Perpetual delights, and everlasting health, will flourish there. "And there shall be no night there, they need no candle, neither the light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light, and they shall reign for ever and ever."

Lastly; let us, then, my brethren, blessed with such privileges, and expectations, be warmed, with a true sense of gratitude, to our deliverer. Did the Son of God come down from heaven to restore lost paradise to us, and shall we not be thankful? If we are not thankful for this, is there any blessing that can make us so? If we do not rejoice in the Lord, we are insensible of our privileges, and incapable of enjoying them. But how shall we show this gratitude? Let our Lord himself determine,—“If ye bring forth much fruit, so shall ye be my disciples indeed.” Let us distinguish between kindness and partiality: if we, being wild by nature, are engrafted into the good olive-tree; or, if we, transplanted, through mercy, into a kindly soil, yet

yet should bring forth no fruit; we are not fit for God; and this will be our sentence,—"cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?" Much less let us imagine, that if our fruit be evil, we can be accepted of him. "For a good tree cannot bring forth corrupt fruit, neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. For every tree is known by his own fruit: for of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble-bush gather they grapes;" and as, by our fruits, we shall be known, so, according to our fruits, shall be our reward.

However, let no man judge another by his own standard. The qualities of God's plantation, though all salutary, yet are different. All Christians have not the same office; all have not the same talents; all have not the same means of growth. Some are weak, others strong; some afford both shade and shelter, others want support. But let not the weak envy the strong, nor the strong neglect the weak. Let no man despise another; but let all liberally communicate, according as they have received, and edify one another; that so they, who depend upon one common Lord, may promote the common good of each other.

Moreover,

Moreover, let not the weak repine at Providence, but endeavour to grow strong. Let not the young Christian despond, because he meets with many obstructions in his growth, and rivals not the aged; but remember, that there are first blossoms, then fruit; that the grape is ripening in the flower, and that God will afford the young convert grace for grace. Religion is improved by a gradual increase. We receive from the Lord the means of divine nurture, and grow till we arrive at a due maturity. Those means chiefly are a devout use of the various ordinances our Lord hath instituted in his church; and particularly, a constant observance of prayer, in private, and in public; and a sacramental participation of the body and blood of Christ. Let us all, then, press forward, and watch the intimations of his grace, and use the means, and place ourselves under his discipline; and then, though our beginnings have been small, yet our latter end will greatly increase. We shall bring forth fruit that will be accepted, through the mercy of God, in Christ Jesus our Lord.

To whom, with the Father, and the Holy Ghost, be all glory and adoration paid, now, and for evermore.

SERMON XXI.

THE RITE OF CONFIRMATION.

ACTS viii. 17.

Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.

AS the time approaches for an episcopal confirmation of the youth of this parish, I think it my duty to give you a general view of the nature, and obligation, of this much-neglected ordinance; in which, as there are many things, which more immediately concern those, who are of an age more peculiarly fitted to partake of it, so there are some, which are worthy the consideration of those of riper years, and a more advanced progress in religion.

If we consider the minister's share in this business, it will be found to contain in it, a mixture both of pleasure and of pain. It is a
plea-

pleasure to store the minds of young persons with such solid truths as are necessary to their growth in grace, and their establishment in that covenant, into which they entered at the first stage of their existence; whilst, on the other hand, we cannot but lament, that an institution, derived from the purest sources, and adapted, from its very nature, to christian improvement, should, notwithstanding, be so unable to maintain its influence, as to be despised, or perverted, by a great majority amongst us. The seasons of confirmation prove, if we had no other proof, that there are few sponsors, indeed, who attend to their promised charge; and that there are few of those, who are baptized in infancy, and are come to years of discretion, that regard the covenant of their God. But, whilst we lament this, let us endeavour to seek a remedy; and, though none should be found sufficient for the abandoned and perverse, let us try to win those, who would listen to instruction, and are, perhaps, led to carelessness, and inattention, through ignorance of their duty.

For their sakes, therefore, particularly, I have undertaken the province of recommending the ordinance before us. We read, in the
chapter,

chapter, from which the text is taken, that Philip, the deacon, having profelyted, and baptized, the people of Samaria; the apostles, Peter and John, went down to confirm them in the faith, by laying on of hands, and communicating to them, thereby, the gifts and graces of the spirit. In conformity to this primitive example, the bishops, as successors of the apostles, and superior officers in the church of Christ, have, ever since the apostolical times, employed this edifying institution, to the improvement, and establishment, of young Christians. This rite, then, though not commanded by Christ, bears the stamp of earliest antiquity; and is, on that account, entitled to our veneration. But, as it promotes edification, it is entitled to more; it becomes a duty, not to be despised without great blame.

As children are, through mercy, entitled to the covenant of grace, when they are admitted into it by baptism, though silent themselves, they speak by their sureties: through these, they make such professions of faith and duty, as are correspondent to their privileges. In *confirmation*, they ratify, and confirm, this profession; the bishop, to whom this is made,
blesses

blesse them, by laying on of hands, and implores a blessing, that they may receive such assistance, from the spirit of God, as may endue them with strength proportioned to their conflicts, and grace to persevere, unto their lives end.

In the primitive church, when *adult* persons were generally baptized, confirmation, we find, soon followed baptism. It was, then, thought necessary to use every means to establish them in the faith which they professed. But the necessity is increased, since, now, persons are, in infancy, admitted into the church of Christ, lest they should be always infants in religion, strangers to the divine love, through Christ, and perpetually enslaved to the tyranny of sin. Infants can make no acknowledgments of covenanted mercy; adult persons may, and ought to do it. Infants cannot be acquainted with christian duties; but, as soon as they have received previous instruction, and obtained understanding, in the way of godliness, a ratification of their vow is justly expected. The same necessity, which obliged them to enter into their covenant, by baptism, makes it expedient for them to acknowledge it in confirmation.

firmation. If they do this in sincerity, it shews that they do not repent of the sacred privileges to which they were then admitted, nor of the engagements, under which they were brought. If they refuse to do it, it shews that they disregard both the one and the other; and creates a strong suspicion, that if it had been left to their own choice, they would, probably, not have been baptized.

When, in confirmation, young persons are put in mind of their privileges, these are so noble and transcendent, that they naturally impress a candid and a feeling mind with a lively sense of God's love, manifested in the redemption through Christ. They call forth the latent sparks of gratitude, before the affections of the soul are debased, by habits of iniquity. When they confess their obligation to the duties, they must be strangely inconsistent, if they do not examine their own hearts and conduct, by their obligations. Have they renounced sin at their baptism? Out of their own mouths, they declare that they are willing to resist its power. They are warned, by their own acknowledgements, of the devices of Satan, of the corruptions of their own nature, of the deceitfulness of the world,

that grand impostor, from whom such multitudes receive their maxims, their manners, their principles, their education. Here, they not only profess the faith, as it is in Christ Jesus, but are constrained to bring it to its proper test; that, as they embrace salvation through Christ, so they must be prepared for the reward he bestows, by the obedience which he enjoins. To this we may add, that when young persons partake of confirmation freely and voluntarily, when they enter into the true spirit of the ordinance, it shews they value both the privileges and duties. It becomes, therefore, a mark of their sincerity, and affords an encouraging prospect of perseverance and success. The vows of God are upon them, and come in to the aid of conscience, to give them a lively sense of duty, to quicken the tardy, to recal the wandering, and reproach those with their grievous backslidings, who fall from the covenant of their Lord.

It is, moreover, an incentive to every means of grace, and affords an introduction to such helps, as are necessary for the progress of a Christian. Particularly, it gives a title to the Lord's Supper; which, those who neither

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have

have been, nor are desirous of being confirmed, are excluded from, by the ancient discipline of our church. As, in her judgment, they who refuse to acknowledge the obligation of their covenant, are unworthy to partake of the privileges of it.

It may perhaps be objected to this part of the ordinance, I mean, the public ratification of our baptismal vow, that it is merely instrumental, and therefore not to be insisted upon as absolutely necessary. It is granted. Many situations may happen, in which it cannot be obtained; opportunities may be lost, not to be recovered. And, indeed, I freely acknowledge, that the want of the ordinance may be supplied by other means of grace; and tender consciences need not be wounded by injunctions too severe. In such circumstances, the *sincere* use the helps they have, and both implore devoutly, and justly expect a blessing. But this is no encouragement to the negligent, the wilful, and *contemptuous*. When young persons behold occasions for improvement, and embrace them not, they know not the importance of christian opportunity, nor how great the loss; when they despise them, they sin presumptuously. Religion is so necessary,

cessary, and so urgent, that its meanest instruments ought to be highly valued, and will be seized with grateful eagerness by the humble and conscientious.

It may also be objected, that this appendage to baptism is not instituted by Christ, but ordained only by the church. But the church founds her injunction upon apostolical authority. The church, as a society, is empowered to ordain rules for church-fellowship. These, if they are neither repugnant to the doctrine of Christ, nor burdensome in their nature, but contribute to the edification of her members, bind the conscience, and distinguish the obedient conformist from the proud schismatic, and still prouder infidel. "He that heareth you," says Christ, "heareth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me; and he that despiseth me, despiseth him that sent me." He then that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, whatever pretensions he makes to liberty of thinking, or of acting.

And from hence, I shall draw an additional argument for a conformity to this very ordinance. In its own nature, it tends to promote harmony

harmony among Christians, as it is a joint acknowledgment of one common vow, and receiving a blessing, in one social band, from the regular and appointed pastor of the flock. It is for want of such ties as these, that so many are fond of running into the crooked paths of schism. They have no foundation laid for christian unity; their minds are untutored in the very first principles of faith; and their consciences uninformed in the nicer, peculiar, and distinguishing duties of their profession.

To prevent these illusions, to store the youthful mind with solid, though perhaps unfashionable truths, is the pleasing office of the christian minister, in the preparatory instruction of young candidates. As he watches the opportunity to edify his charge, whatever affords it he embraces, as it affords the means of doing good. At the same time that he confers a kindness, he receives a much greater in return. The seasons of confirmation, therefore, he uses as occasions to conciliate the minds of his flock, to encrease his regard and affection for them, and make it perpetual. Need I add, that as this connexion is mutual, it is the duty both of minister and people to

improve it; and that the consent of both is necessary to make it remembered with joy, when both the one and the other shall appear before the great Shepherd, and account for talents given, for edification received, for labour bestowed, for gratitude returned.

But a chief part of the ordinance still remains to be considered. The bishop's imposition of hands, attended with solemn prayers for the persons to be confirmed, follows the ratification of their vow. This apostolical rite, when used in confirmation, was anciently attended with the miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost, enabling the disciples to speak with new tongues, and perform many wonderful works. These gifts were necessary for the first planting of the church of Christ. When they ceased, the rite was still continued; young Christians were still blessed by the episcopal order; and the more excellent graces of the spirit were implored, that they who had been sanctified in baptism, might be strengthened in their christian course, and at length be crowned with victory. This is the end, which may now be expected upon those, who are fitted to receive it. For it is God's own covenant, that is ratified; it is the
sacred

sacred institution handed down to us from the beginning, that is regarded. May we not, therefore, justly hope, that he will bless so pious a work, by the communications of his spirit, when earnestly intreated? If, indeed, the true meaning of the ordinance is disregarded, no benefit can justly be expected from it, but God is mocked, and displeased, by using the ordinance amiss. But since this is his gracious promise, "ask and ye shall have;" since he is always ready to bless his ministers; and is with them alway to the end of the world; what may we not look for, when they call down a blessing upon the young, the gentle, the growing lambs of the flock? Does not the whole tenor of the new covenant shew the necessity of spiritual influences, and the ready means of their access? Since, then, it is the spirit which supports and strengthens the young Christian, which attends his silent progress, which gives him a quick sense of duty to God and man, which makes him grow in humility as he grows in grace, which beats down conceit, which establishes his comforts upon their true foundation, then the appointed means, which are directed to these great things, ought to be desired and embraced by all, who name the name of Christ.

Should any still be hardened and puffed up in their vain imaginations, let me expostulate with them, with a necessary freedom. You, my brethren, profess yourselves members of the reformed church of England, yet pay no regard to her care and affection for you. You acknowledge its government by bishops, yet are inexcusably negligent of their original and apostolical use. You expect a blessing from God, yet either ask it not at all, or ask it amiss. You require such a miracle, which was never wrought: you would be blessed with a disobedient heart. What, then, though others that begin in duty, may possibly fail through their own improvidence hereafter in obtaining their end; this affords no apology for you, that despise your benediction, like profane Esau, who afterwards found no room for repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.

Perhaps you act upon another principle: you call the institution a form, and you are for something more substantial. But if you think you have authority to chuse, where your duty is concerned, you are deficient in its very first principles. It is allowed that more important institutions than this, nay, even

even religion itself, are too often converted into formality, by self-delusion. How often does faith itself degenerate into mere opinion, and experiences become false and groundless, through the leaven of pride and disobedience. Will you, then, seek the pure and ingenuous spirit of the gospel with such a temper?—you will not find it. It will leave you the painted outside, the mere disguise of a Christian, and go to dwell with the humble-minded. God is a God of order and of peace, and hath ordained, that the self-sufficient, in whatever garb they appear, should be self-supported; and that they, who even seek the spirit in a disorderly manner, should meet with a very disorderly spirit. But let the means of grace be what they will, if they are used with a disposition suited to their true end and purport, they *will* be efficacious. Though, then, vast numbers do, it is to be feared, make this ordinance but a form, you, *the objectors*, are guilty of despising both the form, and the reality, both the shadow and the substance. Should any think this too severe, they must be unaccountable strangers to the complexion of the present times, and the urgent calls of the occasion.

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But of many of you, my brethren, I hope better things. And I exhort such of you, as are going to be confirmed in your baptismal covenant, to consider well the nature of that covenant: a dispensation of mercy, through which, you, by grace, are incorporated in Christ your head, taken into God's family, and entitled to an inheritance in his kingdom. What things are these! As you cannot value them enough, so your gratitude will still fall short of their transcendent worth. Labour, then, to be more deeply impressed with the riches of redeeming love, which took the advantage, as it were, of your misery, to relieve you, and of your poverty to make you rich indeed. "Lord, what is man, that thou art thus mindful of him, and the son of man, that thou so regardest him!"—and what shall you return unto the Lord, for all these benefits conferred upon you?

As you are about to renew your part of the covenant, which consists of duties to be performed, consider what an awful transaction is this renewal. Behold *him* present with you, who is not to be deceived by professions, who tries the thoughts, and searches the affections. Is there any room for iniquity in the heart
before

before such a God? Can you offend against love, and yet be guiltless? Can you hereafter serve the world, the flesh, and the devil, which you have in your *own persons* renounced, and not be impeached of broken vows? Examine, then, yourselves, according to the tenor of your own professions, and know the terms on which you stand. Remember also the gospel is a dispensation of love, the foundation of which is laid in Christ Jesus. Build upon this foundation, which is a rock: if you reject this, there is no other, that will abide. There is no other way to everlasting life, but that which God has prepared and pointed out. But in vain do you profess the knowledge of your Redeemer, if you deny him in your works. His priesthood will be of no avail, if you do not receive him as the Lord and Master of your heart. See, then, that your faith is fruitful, that you not only serve the Lord with all humility of mind, but carry the same disposition in every act of duty towards man; that your faith may not be condemned, nor your works rejected.

Oh! then, my young friends, regard the honour of your vows. As God is true to his promises, be you true to yours. And remember

ber, this ordinance does not supersede the use of other means, but implies them. No man's prayers will avail you, if you do not pray for yourselves. The solicitude of others will be of no benefit, if you have no compassion for your own souls. If you are languid, or treacherous, your enemies will return with double force upon you; and should they prevail over you, you will grow weaker, for your former resolutions, till at length you will lose the power to return to God. Let this, then, be the desire of your hearts,—What must I do to continue in God's love, and attain the end of my faith, the salvation of my soul? Oh may this desire live in you, till it be accomplished!—that so your blessings may be blessed indeed, your pardon sealed, your adoption manifested, and your inheritance enjoyed through that mercy, which endureth for ever and ever.

Now, to God the Father, &c.

SERMON XXII.

THE MEMORIAL OF CHRIST.

LUKE xxii. 19, 20.

And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body, which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the New Testament in my blood, which is shed for you.

AS our Saviour hath made ample provision for our first recovery from sin, so hath he likewise for preserving our faith, and our allegiance to him. The same love, which moves him to engage our rebellious hearts to his obedience, is constantly shewn in drawing us back, when we are departing, confirming us when we are wavering, and inviting us to a more intimate union with him. The employment of his life was one continued labour of love, and at his departure, he left not his friends without a pledge

pledge of his abode, but appointed this memorial of himself in the words of the text, that as often as they repeated it, they might have a testimony of his affection, and still behold him by faith, though departed from them.

That you, my brethren, may be duly sensible of the value of this sacrament, I shall, in the following discourse, endeavour to set before you, the nature, end, and benefits of it; after which, I shall exhort you to a frequent participation thereof.

And, first, as the lamb slain in the passover was a type of Christ, so the passover itself was a type of the Lord's supper. The passover was a solemn feast, in remembrance of the Israelites' deliverance from Egypt; the Lord's supper is a memorial of our deliverance from sin, accomplished by the Lamb of God upon the cross. Sacrifices were solemn acts of invocation, whereby the offerer eating and drinking at God's table by his appointment, and pleading the promises of his covenant, was certified of the divine favour; since God, vouchsafing to entertain man as his guest, gave him thereby a pledge of his acceptance.

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These

Those sacrifices derived all their virtue from Christ, being in themselves ineffectual to propitiate offended justice. So that when Christ our passover was sacrificed for us, in lieu of these rites he substituted the sacrament of his own body and blood. For this reason, a little before his last passion, he tells his disciples,—"With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer; for I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God." This enlargement of divine grace is not obscurely intimated by the prophet Malachi,—"From the rising of the sun, unto the going down of the same, my name shall be great among the Gentiles, and in every place incense shall be offered in my name, and a pure offering." Christ being come, this prophecy is now fulfilled; and one grand spiritual service is appointed, in which, by the elements of bread and wine, we plead before God the merits of Christ's death, and humbly require him to bestow them upon us, by virtue of that sacrifice, which these represent; in which also, God graciously accepts this our commemoration, and applies the benefits of his passion to those, who implore them with contrite hearts.

This

This sacrament, then, is naturally divided into two branches, one on our part performed to God, the other on God's part performed to us.

Let us first consider the former part. St. Paul informs us that herein "we shew forth the Lord's death, till he come." It is a visible act, in which we declare our trust in him, as a crucified Saviour, and a reliance on him, as a triumphant Redeemer. A declaration this, suitable to the condition of our nature, which is defiled through sin, and has no claim, but through mercy. Here, then, is an invitation to penitent sinners, to present a memorial of that sacrifice to God, by virtue of which they approach the divine presence. Here we have found a Mediator, and how shall we be interested in him, but in the way, which he hath appointed, by representing before the Father of mercy, by the outward elements of bread and wine, that body and blood, to which we owe forgiveness and acceptance? Such supplications must prevail: we take heaven by violence, when the cross is our banner, and Christ our leader. It will invigorate our fainting minds, when protected by his shield: it will pour balm into our wounded spirits, when

when we know that he intercedes in the presence of God for us.

But further, we acknowledge him, in this sacrament, as a crucified Saviour. We record him emptying himself of his own glory, assuming our frail nature, and at length dying upon the cross for us. This is a declaration, that we are not ashamed of his cross,—that it is our joy, our glory, and our crown. Not content to confine our sense of this within our own breasts, we desire to extend its influence to others. Is not this necessary for those, that are redeemed? Is it not of use to have this help afforded us, to express what words alone are not able to convey?

As this sacrament testifies our regard for our Redeemer, so it exalts our love towards him. To behold the marks of the benevolence of one man towards another moves correspondent love: to view the memorials, which departed friends have left behind them, draws sympathetic tears. Here, then, is a remembrance of the love of him, who died for man; of love unmerited, unsought for, infinite. What should be the effect of this? A cold insensibility as often

as it is displayed before us? O torpid breast, where is thy sense of feeling? Nor should it be the sudden emotion of an hour. Is the love of Christ of that perishing nature? ought it not to draw us after him, so as nothing shall be able to separate us from him? Behold the legacy he has left us, himself, not a lifeless corpse, but a living body, once indeed a bleeding victim, now an eternal high priest. Shall not, then, the love we pay him, be in some measure answerable to what we owe?—that it being kindled and preserved by a lively sense of gratitude, what Solomon says may be true of our affection, “Many waters cannot quench it, neither can the floods drown it.”

It is this, which makes the christian eucharist a feast of thanksgiving. When we behold, with the eye of faith, the body of Christ broken, and his blood shed for us, it must warm our frozen hearts, and make them melt in streams of gratitude. Is God to be acknowledged as the giver of the bread, that supports our bodies? Is he not to be adored, that he dispenses food for our souls, and sustains that life of grace, which quickens us? If the slightest mercy challenges our praise, much more, when stupendous mercy is before us,

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Our Lord, before he brake the bread, blessed it, and gave thanks. His, indeed, was the bread of affliction, and the cup of bitterness; ours, the bread of life, and the cup of salvation. Nevertheless, blessing and thanksgiving were the introduction to his agonies, and shall we be silent, when we hope to receive the benefits of them? No; in the language of our excellent liturgy, let us "with angels, and archangels, and all the company of heaven, laud and magnify thy glorious name;" O Lord, "evermore praising thee, and saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts, heaven and earth are full of thy glory: Glory be to thee, O Lord most high."

Another end of the Lord's supper, is to renew that covenant of peace we first made with God, at our baptism. Accordingly, it is called by our Saviour, "the new covenant in my blood."

This is admirably adapted to our wants. Where is the man, that can say, My heart always abhorred sin and vanity; my feet never wandered in the paths of transgression. In this ordinance, we are called to examine ourselves, to acknowledge our iniquities before God, and then eat and drink at his table. Here we seal our covenant afresh, which our sins had almost cancelled. It is here, then, the burden

of sin is thrown off, and the forebodings of despair are silenced. So that, struck with the apprehension of mercy, each penitent sinner cries out, with thankful acknowledgements,—
 “Behold, we come unto thee, for thou art the Lord our God.”

Here we renounce all other dependencies, and resign ourselves to the government of our Lord. Sin had polluted the soul of the transgressor, and destroyed his peace. It now appears deservedly odious; and his contrition takes the deeper root, in proportion as mercy appears more truly mercy. Thus, won by love, he esteems himself to be no more his own; but, as he is bought with a price, he becomes a willing purchase; he vows renewed obedience, and resolves, with the assistance of his Saviour, to cleave to him for ever.

But, that nothing may be wanting to complete this ordinance, it is a bond of church communion. “*We*, being many,” says the Apostle, “are one bread, and one body, for we are all partakers of that one bread.” As the bread broken is a representation of Christ crucified, so the joint partaking of that bread is an emblem of christian friendship, and a
 mark

mark of that harmonious love, which subsists between those, who, feeding at one table, derive similar influences from one and the same spirit, which worketh all in all. So that this sacrament is not only a test, distinguishing those that belong to the church of Christ, from infidels and schismatics, but a means of incorporating, into one body, all true believers, under Christ, their head. What a bond of charity is here, not depending on the weak uncertain ties of worldly regards, but knit together, in love, by the spirit itself, under the cross of Christ. Happy characteristic, to go hand in hand, as disciples of the same master, children of the same family, and heirs of the same inheritance!

Secondly; this ordinance receives its principal virtue from those inestimable gifts which God conveys to us herein; and they are no other than all those benefits which Christ, by his precious bloodshedding, hath obtained for us. For, when he says,—“This is my body, which is given for you; and this cup is the New Testament, in my blood, which is shed for you.” It is, as if he had said,—This bread, and this cup, received by faith, in remembrance of me, are no longer common

bread and wine, but confer upon true believers all those blessings, which the sacrifice of my body and blood, that I am about to offer on the cross, will procure for them. To the same purpose the Apostle tells us,—
“The cup of blessing which *we* bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? and the bread which *we* break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?” Though it be not his very body and blood, yet it is the communion of them; and all the benefits of them are, by the outward elements of bread and wine, sealed and spiritually communicated to us.

Here, then, my brethren, when you are invited to this sacrament, think you hear your Saviour intreating you,—“Come unto me, all ye that travel and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Is any amongst you wearied with the burden of his sins? Let him come, with a true faith, and lay them down at the altar of peace. Though his offences have been many, and great, here is a feast of reconciliation. Though he brings nothing here, but a broken and contrite heart, God will, through Christ, accept of that. To the poor in spirit, our Saviour, in this sacrament,
makes

makes this comfortable address,—“I, even I am he, that blotteth out thy transgressions, and will not remember thy sins.” Does any among you hunger and thirst after righteousness?—Behold, in this ordinance, the food and nourishment of your souls. Do you desire a more intimate union with your Redeemer?—Derive from hence his sacred influence.

Nor are the benefits, resulting from a participation of this Sacrament, confined to the present life. They reach beyond the grave; for, here, that covenant is sealed by Christ, one condition of which is, “that he will bring us to glory. Because I live, ye shall live also.” Here the pious Christian rests his hopes, knowing that, as Christ has triumphed over death, so all true partakers of his body shall, with him, rise victorious. Do you not desire to share his triumphs; and rejoice at the prospect of such glorious bliss? Come, then, and taste, beforehand, how gracious your Lord is; receive the pledge which he offers. “This is the bread, which came down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread, which came down from heaven. If any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever; and the bread that I will give is my

flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." What a fund of blessings is contained in this!—blessings held out to sinful man, yet worthy the ambition of angels themselves.

Lastly; need I take pains, my brethren, to exhort you to aspire after such privileges as these? Need I persuade you to the health, the life, the salvation of your souls? If these were purchased, at the expence of all the world affords you, you would make a bargain to be envied by the most happy and prosperous. Yet, they are freely offered: you are invited, pressed, and all but compelled, to come to the supper of your Lord. A gracious supper, that requires, indeed, the garment of humility, and the demeanour of gratitude and love; but, without which, you can taste no other blessing; you can relish no other comfort, that the stores of nature can offer you. Here, the master of the feast has all blessings in reserve; and though he is the high and lofty one, that inhabits eternity, yet he here girds himself, and comes forth to serve you. What more do you require? Will you refuse his offers? Will you forsake your own mercies? Will you starve your souls? Or, do you
 6 imagine,

Imagine, that a mere profession of christianity will entitle you to a place at the heavenly banquet? But, can you gain heaven without your passport? Or, receive your inheritance without the seal of your adoption? Be alarmed, then, at that security, which speaks peace, when there is no peace, and persuades you that you are in want of nothing, when you are under an insensible decay, if not spiritually dead. "Awake, then, you that sleep, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you life."

Let me appeal also to your sense of gratitude. Remember what Christ hath done and suffered. Remember his life of labour and reproach; his death of anguish. Remember that all he did, and suffered, was for yourselves; and, that nothing may be wanting to his affections, he has enhanced your obligations still higher, by spreading a table before you, representative of his death, and invites you, with the most generous welcome, "Eat, O friends; drink, O beloved." It was his dying request,—“Do this in remembrance of me.” Could we refuse so small a thing as this, to the desire of a departing friend, like ourselves; and shall we disregard the charge
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of the great friend of sinners, when he was going to lay down his life for us? The sincere believer is distressed to express his gratitude: he rejoices he has an opportunity of expressing it by an action, that edifies and delights together. Whereas, the absentee from the table of the Lord declares, that he is not to be won by any kindnesses; that he is not to be served by love itself. Nay, the most invaluable blessings which entreat his acceptance, give him an occasion to shew an ingratitude, that cannot be equalled.

But, that I may conclude. We are all, my brethren, baptized in the name of Christ. We have undertaken the sacred discipline of his religion. Let us not, then, desert it, by a violation of one of its most important duties. Do we believe, indeed, that Christ is our Lord, and shall we rebel against his authority, by an open disobedience to it? We shall be self-condemned. It will be in vain to plead a scrupulous conscience, when duty is concerned. Is our conscience really tender? It will be mollified under the discipline of Christ; and we shall be afraid both of receiving unworthily, and forsaking the table of the Lord. Away, then, with self-delusion: there is no
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room for it here. He that has said, "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you," has said likewise, "Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" Will you, then, renounce the faith? Will you deny your allegiance to him? If it be in vain to do this, put on the simplicity of babes, and the contrition of mourners; and then come to this holy feast, as often as you are invited, with a lively faith in your Redeemer, and an unfeigned sorrow for your sins; and may the Almighty grant, that you may know, and esteem, and pursue, the things that belong to your peace, before they be taken from you, and hidden for ever from your eyes!

*Now to God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
let us offer up our souls and bodies, a living and
accepted sacrifice, through the alone merits and
mediation of Jesus Christ our Lord.*

SER.

SERMON XXIII.

Lord, and do not the things which I

THE EVILS OF SCHISM.

Will you own your allegiance to him? If it

be in vain to do this, but on the simplicity of

pages, and the contrition of sinners; and

as often as you

For it hath been declared unto me of you, my

brethren, by them which are of the house of

Chloe, that there are contentions among you,

Now this I say, that every one of you saith,

I am of Paul, and I am of Apollos, and I of

Cephas, and I of Christ.

THE catholic disposition of St. Paul appears, from his earnest endeavours, not only for the increase, but for the unity of the flock of Christ. If his abundant labours evidenced the one, his frequent exhortations to mutual harmony and subjection, declared his ardent zeal for the other. It might have been easy for the Apostle to have turned the affection of his converts to the purposes of spiritual ambition. But he knew too well the nature of the church of Christ. He knew that

that faction would throw down the beautiful structure, which zeal had raised, and, that the more numerous the converts were, to different parties in religion, the more dangerous enemies they would be to the kingdom of Christ. But, notwithstanding the Apostle's care, divisions entered. Satan, when he could not prevent the progress of the Gospel, sowed the seed of discord amongst its followers, and still retained a strong party, not only in his own kingdom, the world, but amongst the professors of the faith of Christ. Unhappy church! unhappy Christians! It was the business of the Apostles to root out these tares of the enemy, and restore peace and harmony to the christian fold.

St. Paul, besides the words I have read to you, tells the Corinthians, in another place, — "Ye are yet carnal: for, whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? For, while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos, are ye not carnal?" In the words, preceding the text, he intreats the same Corinthians, — "I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be

no divisions among you." He exhorts the Romans "to mark them, which cause divisions and offences, and avoid them." St. Peter admonishes the christian converts "to be all of one mind." St. John, whose theme was love, describes the antichrists in his days, as "men who went out from us, but they were not of us;" and condemns the conduct of Diotryphes, who set up for the head of a party, and made opposition to the Apostles themselves. St. Jude likewise, denotes certain persons with this censure, "that they separate themselves from their brethren, being led by their own carnal passions, and destitute of that spirit, to which they pretended."

The primitive fathers of the church trod in the steps of the Apostles, and exerted themselves, with peculiar energy, against the heresies and schisms that prevailed in their days. As these declined, others rose in long succession, and have continued, under various names, even to the times in which we live. The church of England, which was formed upon the purest models of antiquity, soon after it arose upon the ruins of popery, as it met with violent opposers, so can boast of strenuous defenders. Nor is it less the duty

of its ministers, in these days, to watch over the flock committed to their trust, and not only to call them from wandering into the wide and howling wilderness, but from deviating into the no less dangerous paths of schism and perverseness.

I shall, therefore, in the following discourse, endeavour, first, to shew the evils of church divisions; and, secondly, give you some directions to preserve the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

First; let us consider the church as the body of Christ. This body, as it depends upon its spiritual head, and derives virtue and support from him, who worketh in it both to will and to do, so it is a *visible society*, joined together by outward bands of fellowship, as it professes one common doctrine, submits to the direction of proper pastors, and meets together at authorized places, and stated times, to offer up united prayers and praises to one God, through one mediator, between God and man. This outward bond is a security for inward peace, and a union of heart and mind is a testimony that we are truly sensible of the relation we bear to our common head, and to

one another. But, when this outward union is broken, and the members of the church split into parties and factions, they forget the relation they bear to each other, and tear asunder the body of Christ. This is the foundation of the Apostle's argument. When, amongst the Corinthians, one said, "I am of Paul; another, I of Apollos; another, I of Christ;" he asks, "Is Christ divided?" You know the mutual alliance that should subsist betwixt those, that are engrafted into his body; why, then, do you dissolve it by your attachment to different heads? And, though some of you profess that you depend upon Christ alone, if this be done in opposition to love, and unity, and mutual subjection, you know not what spirit you are of; you go counter to the energy of his spirit, and endeavour to divide that body, which must be preserved entire. A weighty consideration this, which will be regarded by every Christian, who can distinguish genuine religion from its adulterated mixtures.

St. Paul, when he exhorts the christian converts to speak the same thing, well knew the importance of his own direction, as a means for preventing separations. But, now

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are men to be brought to unity of sentiment? There is one way, and one only; seldom, indeed, thought of by the disputers of this world; it is, by holding the grand doctrines of religion in humility, and simplicity, of mind. Whatever doctrines are revealed, as matters of faith, are to be received with the veneration due to matters of faith. Did all receive them in this manner, there would be no room for dissention. Men would know the province of reason, and confine their curiosity within its proper limits. But, vain man will be wise: if he has no wisdom, he will affect it, and his confidence will often be proportioned to his ignorance. Hence it is that men divide, not about the doctrines themselves, but the various explanations of those doctrines, which are dictated by confidence and error. Vain man will also presume. He will not be content to hold his own explanations, as matters of opinion, but as matters of faith; and, therefore, he becomes a partisan in religion. With men of such a disposition, the apostolical precept of unity is impracticable. How can they speak the same thing, who differ about almost every article of their creed, and maintain their

opinions with an obstinacy equal to their conceit.

When men disagree in sentiment, the next step is, to disagree in affection. When we hold our own opinions to be essential, we shall intrude them upon others with confidence. If they will not receive them, having minds, perhaps, too enlarged for our narrowness and bigotry, we shall first pity, then despise them. We shall separate from their communion, and join ourselves to those, who gratify our own vanity and prejudices. So that that error, which might at first be innocent, grows, at length, to be a dangerous disease of the soul. But what, though the sentiments of bigotted separatists should be true? What are right opinions without right affections? What substitute is there for christian charity? Can zeal make any reparation for dividing the church of Christ? Though zealous "speak with the tongues of men, and of angels, if they have not charity, they are as sounding brass, or tinkling cymbals." Nay, though they give their bodies to be burned for orthodox opinions, if they mix with those opinions a schismatical and factious spirit, it profiteth them nothing.

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If men divide, not about opinions, but church government, and external discipline, let it be remembered, that in every society there must be government, and, if nothing burdensome, or unlawful, be enjoined, submission is a duty. No liturgy, or ceremonies, or rules of church fellowship can please every one's humour. But private humour is of no importance, when it stands in competition with public unity. And if men will not renounce it, in matters not essential, they are guilty of the sin of opposing just authority. It may be sufficient to reply, with the Apostle, to those, who come armed with reasons dictated by private conceit,—“we have no such custom, neither the churches of God.”

These arguments receive additional weight, when we consider the public evils of dissension. Political factions, we know, weaken a state; so do religious factions the church of Christ. When men are split into various denominations, discipline, the external security of good morals, is no more regarded. Absenters from the established church will have their party likewise, and though they dissent not in opinion, will dissent from every exercise of her authority over her disobedient

children. An awful situation, and full of danger, against which there is no other stay, but the most diligent and zealous endeavours of those, who are the appointed guardians and pastors of the flock.

But, alas! how often do *these* endeavours fail! When the spirit of dissention has entered, the demon of unbelief is encouraged to follow after, with all its dire attendants. And when christians are engaged in altercations amongst themselves, they have no power to oppose the common enemy. The adversaries of religion will make the quarrels of its friends an argument against it; whilst men of sceptical minds, taking advantage of the errors of contending sects, will deny the truth, as it is in Jesus. I might appeal for this to that flood of irreligion, which followed the religious confusions, during the rebellion against King Charles the First. I might appeal to the utter devastation of many flourishing churches abroad, which once filled extensive nations both in Asia and Africa, where the gospel seemed to take deep root, and extended its branches from sea to sea. But, discord entered, threw down the fences of the vineyard, and let in ravenous beasts to devour and destroy.

destroy. Religion fled; the impostures of Mahomet succeeded; and the sound of the gospel of Christ is heard no more, or heard in vain.

Further; when men are enlisted under different parties in religion, it is natural that their attention should be taken off, from greater matters, to the peculiar tenets of their sect. It must needs be so, when they confound these tenets with the gospel of Christ, and instead of trying them by the gospel, force the gospel itself to comply with their own principles. Hence it is that they measure their own attainments, by their attachment to a party, and their growth in religion, by the perverseness of their opinions. Hence also it is that peculiar phrases are invented, in order to make their difference from others more conspicuous; and those doctrines are the most insisted on, which favour the pride of a narrow and bigoted soul. All this does infinite prejudice to true religion, which consists not in names and opinions, “but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.” To these grand points, should zeal be directed,—repentance from dead works, faith in Christ, a reliance on his promises, committing our souls and

bodies to him as a faithful Redeemer, walking humbly with our God, living to his glory, obedience to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, a peaceable behaviour, sobriety, and temperance, the duties of justice, charity, humility towards our fellow-creatures, pursued through their minutest branches. These are the things, which should fill the attention, and occupy the labours, of every faithful servant of Christ. In proportion as these are maintained, and urged upon the conscience, there will be no room for lesser differences. But these things are of no party, and therefore serve not the purposes of those, whose business it is to multiply divisions.

This is not all. I would ask those, who are contentious, and abound in self-opinion, that since this is no exclusive privilege, if all men held their private opinions as matters of universal faith, what would ensue? Each would endeavour to gain converts to his opinions: and if all were equally obstinate, as one has the same right as another, men's spirits and tongues would be equally sharpened against each other; religion would be lost in disputation; and the very appearance of peace would be banished, not only from every

every particular church, but from Christendom itself. Where then would be the benign spirit of the gospel? When lions would no longer be transformed into lambs, but lambs put on the fury of lions. This is no ideal thing. A spirit like this has sometimes prevailed; bloody scenes have been really acted; and men, under the pretext of God and religion, have devoured, and been devoured, by one another.

Lets not man bring this as an argument against the religion of Jesus. Religion is not to blame, because men act contrary to its dictates. True religion destroys self-conceit; men will be conceited, and perverse. Religion enjoins peace and harmony; the carnal mind has nothing to do with peace. Religion requires submission; pride puts in its claim for independencce. Is religion to blame, because pride and contention are inherent in corrupted nature? You will easily see that the rights of conscience are not concerned in these matters. Conscience, properly directed, is employed in avoiding evil and pursuing good. What, therefore, shall we say of those, who plead

conscience for separation; but have up conscience for unity?—who glory in dissenting from others, as if union of heart and mind were no christian duty? There is great reason to think, that whatever be the outward plea, perverseness is often the secret cause. Even in the times of the apostles, men spoke perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Could conscience, then, set up a just plea? In points of discipline, the authority of the apostles might have determined them. In points of doctrine, they might have received information from the same source. But factious spirits, whatever be the consequence, will have a psalm, a doctrine, an interpretation of their own. Indeed, we have some instances in our own nation to prove that men, at this very day, separate from their brethren from some other motive than conscience; those, I mean, of our own church, who shelter themselves under the act of toleration, very injuriously as well as illegally, being conformists by ordination, subscription, and the use of the liturgy, but non-conformists with respect to peace and unity, and conscientious submission to the most just authority. These persons come literally under the apostolical reproof, supposing that gain is godliness;

liness; or what is still more culpable, that their own applause is the interest of religion.

These observations, my brethren, there is the more reason to make, because, in general, we have no just apprehension either of the danger, or the guilt of a schismatical spirit. We pray, indeed, against schism; but we take our notions rather from the habit and custom of the times, than from our prayers. We pay more attention to what is tolerated by human laws, than what is wrong in the sight of God. Whereas his will is the grand directory of conscience. And, therefore, schism is to be considered, not merely in a political, but christian view. And, in this respect, the act of toleration, though just in itself, leaves church divisions just as it found them. It can neither add to, nor diminish the offence before God.

I hope you will consider, that it is against the spirit of dissention that these reflections are aimed. Great allowance is to be made for those, who dissent from us through principles of education, and whose charity and candour subdue the ill effects of their prejudices. Not only great indulgence is due to

such,

such, but in whomsoever these virtues appear, what christian is there that will not highly esteem them, however clouded by misapprehension, or allowed by nominal distinctions.

But, secondly, that you, my brethren, may preserve the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, let me exhort you to study peace, and pursue it as earnestly as others break it. It is essential to your profession, that, without it, no man, be his opinions what they will, shall see the Lord. That you may establish it upon the basis of religion, let the great things of salvation occupy your minds. Whilst you receive the doctrines as coming from God, consider their proper efficacy, and the improvement which God requires. If you regard them as mere speculative notions, your pride and your passion may perhaps be exerted in their defence. This the world may miscall christian zeal. But true religion wants not such defenders; it mourns over them as persons estranged from its spirit and its power. Whilst you, then, retain with all firmness the foundation of your faith, hold it not in contention. Men, that quarrel about religion, and that quarrel about a harlot, may be equal offenders against religion. Leave disputes

putes to men, whose learning makes them capable of nice distinctions, and critical researches, and whose candour can make allowance for human error. When ignorant persons commence disputers, they immediately become impudent; and impudence leads to the lowest depths of irreligion. Beware of being positive in difficult points: they belong not to the unlearned, who are led by their own confidence, perhaps under the specious name of the teaching of the spirit, to wrest them to their own destruction. The itch of explaining often ends in the most dangerous mistake of all, the want of charity. Stop, then, the very risings of self-conceit, as the first motions of every sin: give it once the reins, it hastens to ruin, and sets in death.

—Let me entreat you, then, my brethren, to conform conscientiously, both in doctrine and discipline, to that established church, of which you profess yourselves members. Herein, let duty, not humour, guide you; that ye “be not like children, tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.” Trust to her maternal care, and receive with meekness the engrained word, which

which taking root within you, may leave no room for the weeds and tares of spiritual pride. If there be, therefore, any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.

Oh for that blessed day, when we shall have a church at unity within itself, and be one fold as we are under one Shepherd!—when men shall learn to sacrifice opinion to divine faith, not arm opinion against love, nor encroach upon peace, that their own imaginations may be received as the oracles of truth!—when zeal shall be winged with love, and spend its heavenly fire in melting the lukewarm, and supporting the feeble christian!—when love shall still run before ambition, when none shall say, "I am holier than thou," but each esteem other better than themselves!—Then shall odious names and distinctions cease: Christians shall have one common name, as they have one common faith. One interest shall draw pastors and their flocks, knit together in the bands of social love. The people shall pray for their pastors, and pre-

mote the work of God in their hands, whilst the pastors shall feed the flock, not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; that when the chief Shepherd shall appear, they may be blessed together in his blessed fold. O Lord, that this happy day may arrive, hasten thy kingdom of peace. Let it come with all its mild attendants, charity, good-will, mutual forbearance, mutual subjection. Oh, may our hands promote this great salvation, till at length our eyes behold it, and our souls receive the comfortable prospect and assurance of its continuance to everlasting ages!

Now to God the Father, &c.

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SERMON XXIV.

THE CHRISTIAN PILGRIMAGE.

HEBREWS xi. 13.

And confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

AS the works of God fill and confound the thoughtful mind, with their greatness and immensity, in like manner the display of his providence, with respect to man, exhibits a portion of the same astonishing grandeur. In contemplating the former, the eye of the philosopher can pierce but a little way. That we may admire and adore the latter, God hath given us the glass of revelation, in which we may behold the origin, and the end of man, what he is, and whither he is going, his business here, and his portion hereafter. Eternity closes the scene, unriddles the doubts of life, rectifies its inconsistencies, and hushes the storms that trouble it into a calm and awful
silence

silence. What a plan is here formed!—how wonderful the agents!—how immense the scenery!—how astonishing the exit!

A part of this divine dispensation was represented to the patriarchs of old. After the fall of man, they had the promise of a deliverer; and though the world was become a wilderness, yet God condescended to be their guide, and gave them a glimpse of happiness in some future period. Under a conviction that God is true, and a thorough persuasion of the accomplishment of his restoring grace, they became examples to the world of the glorious effects it produced. From hence were derived the piety of Abel, Enoch's walking with God, the obedience of Noah, the resignation and faith of Abraham. Hence those, who were yet strangers in the land of Canaan, looked upon it as their inheritance; and in proportion as the light was more clearly manifested, their faith became more exalted. They pervaded the darkness of futurity, and the number of revolving years, and looked at length for a city, whose maker and builder is God. Hence also arose the courage of those heroes, who, armed with the shield of faith, van-

quered by enduring tribulation; not accepting deliverance.

It was, therefore, with great reason that the Apostle sets before the Christians, in his days, the examples of those, who had gone before them as instances of fortitude and perseverance. If the way they trod was the same suffering way, there was still the same comforter to cheer them in it; and it led, as it did before, to the same enduring mansions. The argument became stronger, when it was considered that their predecessors, having beheld the promises afar off, embraced them; whereas they were now fulfilled in their brightest evidence, Christ had been revealed, his glory had been displayed, and by all the circumstances of his life, death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven, he had enabled men to form a just estimation of this changeable and fleeting world. These things, my brethren, belong likewise to us. I shall not use many words to prove, that the earth hath not changed its nature, or that time hath not lost its instability. Our life is still a pilgrimage. As soon as we come into the world, we begin our journey, and are carried forward on the

the rapid wings of time. We stop not even for a moment; and if, through inattention, we discern not the flying hours, they leave their account behind them, and bring us nearer to our final reckoning.

Whose experience does not teach him, that all things here are changeable and insecure? Our journey affords us great variety, but it is not that variety, which ever pleases the taste, and gratifies the fancy. It is a variety, that is chequered with anxiety and trouble. Some accidents we fear; others overtake us. Some we incur through carelessness; others we invite by our folly and presumption. *Now* we are exposed to the hand of violence; *then* to the snares of secret guile. Sometimes we are indulged with pleasing scenes. All nature seems to smile around us, and dilates our hearts with joy; so that we flatter ourselves, that the earth is a desirable habitation, and that we have attained the happiness we sought. But how momentary is this delusion! Some inward plague preys upon our bliss, or perhaps, by some unexpected woe, we are plunged into misery and ruin. The longer we live, the more we experience the treachery and danger of our pilgrimage. Before we have run out

half our course, the cordial hope loses its sweet enchantment, and becomes alloyed with bitter suspicions; till at last, the most tempting offers pass by us unheeded and despised.

But our enjoyments here are at all times unsatisfactory. Paradise fled with innocence; and when man seeks for happiness in the indulgences of the world, he opposes himself to God's decree. Full content is only to be found, where God has placed it. Man would not be dependent, if he could find it, wherever he chose to seek it. Consult the scriptures: they proclaim sensual enjoyments to be dreams and shadows, lying vanities, broken reeds, cisterns that hold no water. Consult experience: are not the voluptuous, the covetous, the ambitious, always craving, never happy? When their satisfactions are over, they appear to themselves to have had no more substance than a vision of the night. Who was greater in splendour of living, in renown, in military honours, than the celebrated marshal Saxe? When he was dying, he said to an approaching friend, "You are come to see the end of a pleasing dream." He had dreamt of glory, victory, and triumphs; and when

when he was awakened from this dream by death, he carried away with him the trophies and feathers that adorned his hearse. Such is all human greatness. Riches and honours are like the fading flowers, which tempt the eye. We may weave them into a garland, and wear it till death. It will then wither, and be fit for nothing. An unfading crown alone will serve us in future worlds. Should we be so unhappy as to be deluded by these trifles, how short and transient is this very delusion? For how quickly does life itself come to its final period! Having forfeited immortality through sin, we continue here merely through the divine sufferance, and are reprieved only from one moment to another. The world, as it is suited to man's apostacy, so it is provided for his probation, and when that is closed by God's appointment, he has no business here; he is called away, and makes room for others. Some wither in the bloom of life. Others are laid low at the very summit of their ambition; or, they have just had time to fill their coffers, and then expire. The first days of vain man, are occupied in the toils of procuring wealth; and the remainder, troubled in the certain prospect of quickly losing it. They build houses, and others inhabit them;

they plant vineyards, and eat not the fruit of them. If we may learn wisdom from those, who are alienated from the common-wealth of Christ, the Turks will afford us a lesson of instruction. It is remarked of them by travellers, that in the structure of their houses, they disregard external splendour, for this reason, that they must shortly leave them, and be content with a fordid sepulchre.

Christians have before them far more edifying examples than these, and far nobler motives, than any which the state of this world can offer, which enable them to look beyond it. They know the privileges of their calling. As they live by faith in the divine promises, which are made to the world through Christ, they become renewed in the spirit of their minds, and are enabled to give every thing its proper estimation. It is true, they receive, and use the goods of life, with thankfulness, but they expect from them no more than they can give, and suffer the loss of them with resignation. They know the true improvement of time, and are enabled to redeem it. The temptations of the world allure not them to loitering; nor do its frowns dishearten them. But they press forward with vigour
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and perseverance. They urge their way through evil report, and good report, and aim at a character superior to any, which this world acknowledges. Whatever befalls them, here, from the vicissitudes of life, it is well with them; for their portion is laid up with God. Their last change alarms them not: it brings them to their expected home, where their toils are ended, and their labours rewarded. It is recorded of that great and good man, archbishop Leighton, that he was desirous of putting off mortality in an inn, a place emblematical of the condition of human life. He did so, when the provision for his journey was just spent, and his hopes full of immortality.

The use I would make of this doctrine is, to put you, my brethren, upon enquiry, into the real condition of your souls. What is the scope of your labours? Is it to provide only for your well-being here? Your end is too low for immortals; your labours inadequate to the primary end of human life. But, perhaps, you do more. Perhaps you add to your diligence, sobriety and honesty; and have, for these, obtained reputation among men. Much more than this is wanting to make your

end complete. You must leave your character behind you; and, were it otherwise, it would be of no use, where you are going. What, then, is the prime end of your affections? Do you labour for God? Do you lay hold upon eternal life? This is the very criterion of your profession, and will distinguish you from those, that have only the form of godliness, and those that seek to enter into bliss, with carnal and earthly minds. Are your faces, then, set towards the new Jerusalem? Are your desires suited to your expectations? Your longings after true felicity in any measure answerable to its transcendent worth?

Let me persuade you, my brethren. Things of vast importance demand your attention. You have nothing here, to detain the glorious ambition of an immortal soul. Here you have no continuing city. In a few years, perhaps a few days, you will change your habitations, quit your bodies, and bid adieu, for ever, to this globe, and the sun that enlightens it. You expect a new world to open before you; and yet does this fleeting world take up your most serious and important thoughts? Do you strive to catch it, as it flies,

files, and strive in vain? Are you so intent upon it, that you have no room in your minds for any other, so eager after its enjoyments, that you can relish no other bliss? Make, then, the most you can, your happiest portion in it need not be envied.

Is this then, your portion? Can you really call the good things, even of this life, your own? If you can, command them to stay with you. Say, they shall be your's to-morrow. How know ye but, *before* to-morrow you may be called, by the true proprietor, to give an account how you have used them? They were given you for your accommodations upon the road, but you pass away, and they are delivered to another master. The truth is, we have lost an enduring possession here; but our reversion remains in future worlds. We are called, then, by the very nature and disposition of things, to walk by faith, not by sight; not to use as our own, what belongs not to us, lest we forfeit what actually does.

But, if no account remained to be hereafter settled, where is your wisdom to grasp, with eagerness, what you must quit so soon?

Youth is often deceived; they think that life is long, because the end is involved in darkness. Regarding, therefore, their own imaginary prospects more than the experience of those that are departing, to-morrow, they think, shall be as this day, and much more abundant. But, let me appeal to those that are advanced in life. Have not *your* expectations diminished, as your days have increased upon you? Are you not laid hold of by time, before you were aware of its approach? Ought not, then, all of you to prevent, by wisdom, and redeem, through grace, the rolling years? What pity is it, that you should not know your situation, till you are going to leave it!—to find out your own poverty, and not have provided the true riches?—nor to be apprized of the shortness of life, till you have nothing left, but the last painful moments! O the vanity of late wisdom! Like Polly's blossom, it blows in winter, decays, and bring forth no fruit.

If, then, my brethren, you profess yourselves, as you must, pilgrims and passengers to the eternal world, walk as becomes your situation. You call yourselves the disciples of Christ. Do you, then, disburden yourselves
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of things inconsistent with your profession? Are you willing to depend upon his strength, to be guided by his light, and follow the steps, which he trod before you? Do you partake of his ordinances, and, in the appointed means of grace, seek for those comforts which he administers in this day of trial? Do you, moreover, keep the rank which he has assigned you? Do you follow after peace and love? God will admit of no disorder amongst his little flock. Take the right road to heaven; if you turn aside through by-paths, led away by self-opinion, and self-conceit, you lose your guide; bewildered in the mazes of your own perverseness, you will be taught your folly only by your danger. As obedient children, you will be admitted into heaven. But let your professions, or opinions, be what they will; if you are self-sufficient, or boasters, or revilers, or disobedient either to God or man, you fight against God, and must be excluded. Prosecute, then, the narrow way; but I caution you against the way of thousands; it leads to certain ruin.

Lastly; if you are pilgrims here, be not surprised that all things do not answer to your wishes. Murmur not at the hardships you
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sometimes undergo. It is God's appointment, that tribulation should be the road to his kingdom, both as the discipline of your affections, and the trial of your patience. You are, perhaps, overtaken by the calamities of life. Penury, or disease, or old age, bow you down; or you suffer from the wantonness or malice of your fellow-creatures. But would you have God change the nature of things for you? Would you have the wilderness of sin transformed into a paradise for you? All that can be done has been done already. For your sakes, did Christ descend from above, to shew you the way to bliss; to support you under your trials; to comfort those that mourn; to relieve the heavy laden. But in what manner did Christ accomplish this? Was it not by suffering? Be content, then, to tread the steps, which he trod before you. He is now a witness of your toils; he sympathises with your distresses. Faint not, then, O ye poor and distressed, when you have such a leader; despond not, when you have such a saviour. But look to him, and run with patience the race that is set before you. For yet "a little while, and he that shall come, will come, and will not tarry." It is fitting that you should wait for your prize, till you have finished

finished your course; for your "light affliction, which is for a moment, worketh for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

Look also to Jesus as a triumphant Redeemer. Consider the value of the prize, which he hath purchased, and which he now holds forth as the object of your ambition. Are you foreigners here? Learn the language of heaven. Let your conversation be there, where you expect to be. Are you not entitled, here, to any privileges that can be ensured? Aspire to be denizens of that city, to the freedom of which you are invited. Spend not idle wishes after the attainment of such a fortune, or such preferment; for after these things do the children of this world labour. But let this be your ambition—to search after the true riches, to look to the mansions, where your Redeemer reigns, and to seek there, glory, and honour, and immortality.

O eternity! how does time, and wealth, and honour, and kingdoms, vanish before thee? When the earth, and all things in it, shall be burnt up, then will commence thy unbounded and universal reign. Then will
faith

faith be swallowed up in vision; but our works will follow us there. Such as we have been, in the time allotted us here, such we shall be, when time shall be no longer. I shall, therefore, leave you, with this consideration, to which nothing can be added, to make it more important,—“What manner of persons ought we now to be, in all holy conversation and godliness!”

To God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, let us ascribe all praise, and thanksgiving, now, and for evermore.

SERMON XXV.

GLORYING IN THE CROSS.

GAL. vi. 14.

God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.

NOTHING so effectually shews the tendency of the human mind, as those things, wherein it places its esteem and confidence. They influence its desires, and regulate its pursuits and actions. It is, therefore, a point of wisdom to interest the mind in such objects as are, in themselves, the most excellent, and bring with them the purest and most lasting happiness. Accordingly, the Apostle hath chosen the cross of Christ, whereon to fix his study and affections. For the excellency of its blessings, he counts all things but loss. They appeared unaffecting and

and dead, when compared with the sacrifice offered upon it; and, therefore, he not only glories in it, but abhors the thought of glorying in any thing else. The judaizing Christians had tempted the Galatians to retain the ceremonial law, as necessary to salvation; a doctrine this, in the Apostle's judgment, exceedingly degrading from the sufficiency of Christ's atonement; and, therefore, he vindicates the honour of that cross, to the efficacy of which he owed every gracious endowment, which he possessed, and through which he was dead, both to the frowns and allurements of the world. Since the efficacy of this cross is still the same, are we not called to tread in the Apostle's steps? Is it not the duty of ministers to urge the same truths, which it was the glory of the Apostle to inculcate, and of all Christians whatever to feel the energy of those truths, which are the distinguishing mark and character of their profession?

I proceed, therefore, by God's assistance, to shew, first, that whatever excellencies we enjoy, it misbecomes us, as we are Christians, to glory in them; but, secondly, that it highly

highly concerns us to glory, with St. Paul, in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

First; some are mad enough to glory in the shewy appearances of life, which have no substance, but what the false imagination gives; proud, because they hold a rank amongst their fellow-worms, or because they are more deeply laden with riches than others. Now, not to mention how unsatisfactory these things are to the immortal soul; how dangerous and ensnaring to the christian pilgrimage; transitory and inconstant in life; vain and worthless in the hour of death; it is sufficient to observe, that the whole economy of grace tends to destroy all undue complacency in them. The work of our redemption was carried on, and finished, without them. The Lord of lords had neither form, nor splendor, nor wealth, to support his inward glory; and if he humbled himself thus low for us, shall we pride ourselves in opposition to his example, and fall down before that mammon, on which he trampled? In vain do we call ourselves the disciples of a suffering Redeemer, if we are strangers to his spirit. The virtues, which he taught, are set in equal opposition to vanity and boasting. His gospel requires

requires mourning for sin, in the midst of prosperity; mortification, in health and affluence; and poverty of spirit, to shine through the most brilliant station, and adorn a crown. How does it make grandeur blush, and gold and silver sink into a heap of dross and earth, when compared with these superior gifts of God; nay, degenerate into poison and destruction itself, when they claim the chief place in our hearts, and exalt themselves against that wisdom, which is from above?

The endowments of the understanding; an enlarged capacity; the acquirements of learning; and that wisdom, which the world favours and extols, are likewise unworthy of a Christian's glory. These things are only great when compared with ignorance, and the inferior qualities of little minds. They shrink into nothing, before the beams of angelic knowledge, or even that measure of light, which will be poured upon sanctified spirits. Indeed, when they are subservient to the glory of God, and the good of men, they afford matter for praise, but not for glory. The more a Christian grows in the knowledge of the Gospel of Christ, the less he will pride himself in any other knowledge; and the

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more deeply will be laid the foundation of humility. Indeed, the doctrine of a crucified Saviour is, itself, sufficient to mortify the pride of human wisdom, since it baffled, by the meanest instruments, the powerful learning that opposed it; and, at length, triumphed over every obstruction; shewing us, that God is wiser than man, and teaching us this important lesson, that no flesh should glory in his presence, but that he that glorieth should glory in the Lord.

Nor, indeed, have we more reason to boast of our virtues, and good deeds; because they are, of themselves, tinged with the base alloy of our sinful nature, and will not bear the test of the divine justice. Wilt thou, then, O vain man! triumph in an imaginary worth, and pretend to disguise thy imperfections by unprofitable services? The sincere Christian is convinced of this unprofitableness; and, therefore, at the same time that he brings forth the fruits of holiness, acknowledges, that, as they are produced in him by God's goodness, so to the same goodness he trusts for their acceptance. He does not commit sin that grace may abound, nor intermit his labours, because they can claim no reward;

but, at the same time that he follows after the highest attainments, confesses himself less than the least of God's mercies, and, whilst he does better things than others, esteems others better than himself. Do we then, my brethren, aspire after the christian character?—let us work out our own salvation with fear and trembling. Instead of being puffed up with vain conceit, let us silence every pretence of worth with the Apostle's questions, "Who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou, which thou hast not received? Now, if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?"

Secondly; the Apostle's choice, with respect to glorying in the cross of Christ, will be highly justified, if we consider the unmerited honour conferred upon the human race, by the Lamb of God, who was offered upon it. He was from everlasting to everlasting, God; we, the creatures of a day, dust in our original, and in our end. He was of unspotted purity; we, overwhelmed with pollution, and with guilt. He was our Lord, we, rebellious to his authority. He saw us perishing, and was touched with compassion towards us.

The price of his compassion was suffering and death. He was wounded for our transgressions, he died that we might live. Can we consider the cross in this view, and refrain from glorying in it? Do we applaud ourselves in the condescension of our superiors on earth, and shall we not much more rejoice at the unexampled love of an Almighty Saviour? so that all the powers of gratitude may engage us to cry out, "Lord, what is man, that thou art thus mindful of him, or the son of man, that thou shouldst so regard him?"

But, further; by virtue of the cross, the kingdom of Christ is made illustrious, and extended over the visible and invisible worlds. His triumphs over Satan were completed upon the cross, and his exaltation as Messiah arose from his perfect obedience there. Though his glories were then obscured, it was that they might afterwards shine the brighter, and fill the world with their display. So that he now sits a priest upon his throne, and bears the keys of life and death. This is he, who liveth and was dead, and behold he is alive for evermore. This is he, who sways his sceptre for the good of his people, and sup-

ports them with his arm, till they take possession of their crown. A King he is, whose eye is ever watchful, whose ears are alway open. A King, who rejoiceth over us with joy, who rests in his love, the same yesterday, to day, and for ever. Who is there of you, my brethren, conscious that he careth for you, that would not glory in his affection? O let Israel rejoice in him that made him, let the children of Sion be joyful in their King. Let the rich and noble despise all honour in comparison of this, and let the outcast and poor still glory in him, who is mighty to save and to deliver.

Nor shall we have less reason to glory in the cross, if we reflect on the privileges, which accrue to us thereby. "You," saith the Apostle, "being dead in your sins, and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; blotting the hand-writing of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross;" for by this sacrifice he hath made a full satisfaction to offended justice. Is it possible, then, for a Christian, not to glory in the cross, when such a burden
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of sin is thereby removed? Go, bid the insolvent debtor not be thankful for a complete discharge, or the long enthralled prisoner not rejoice in his deliverance. They indeed who are in love with sin can have no affecting views of a Redeemer's love; but the sincere Christian cannot be insensible of it, or forget the remembrance of its author. Filled with its powerful energy, he is satisfied and renounces all other glory. As for those, who are not interested in the death of Christ, there is a secret worm, which preys upon their boasted happiness, and disappoints the expectation of the fairest fruits. Conscience of guilt, of unforgiven guilt, will attend their slumbers, and pursue their waking dreams. So that this will often be the language of their souls, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this burden!" Let us, then, my brethren, give glory to that grace, which hath deprived sin of this sting, and death of its terrors.

It is to this we owe, not only that our sins are forgiven, but that we ourselves are accepted. The death of Christ hath procured an abundant redemption, not merely an exemption from punishment, but infinitely more.

His

His obedience is of the same value with his atonement, and by means of both we have peace with God through Jesus Christ. So being reconciled through him, the great Jehovah is our father and our friend. Even when he chastises, he loves. Afflictions lose their bitterness, and death its horrors. The world itself, life, death, things present, and things to come, are all amongst the treasures of a Christian. Blessings are multiplied upon us from the storehouse of heaven, and all things work together for our good. The whole creation is subservient to the people of God, and even the angelic hosts delight in ministering to their welfare. Victory and salvation are their's, for they are Christ's, and Christ is God's. O thou great Immanuel, what remains, but that thou give us hearts and tongues, to declare thy noble acts, and shew forth thy praise!

The last reason why we should glory in the cross of Christ, is the Apostle's own, since thereby "the world is crucified unto us; and we unto the world." Holiness of life is the great end of our christian calling, a necessary mark of our adoption through Christ: knowing this, "that our old man is crucified with him,

him, that the body of sin should be destroyed." He it is, that having made propitiation for iniquity by his death upon the cross, sends the Holy Ghost to make men new creatures, and save them from the power, as well as from the guilt of sin; so that they are enabled and prepared to embrace the sovereign good. The life of Christ is their pattern, and their study is to attain those graces, which shone in him with superior lustre. Accordingly, the Apostle professes of himself, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." How odious does sin appear, when contrasted with this love? How horrible, when it requires such love as the love of Christ to expiate its malignity. How, then, shall we, who are thus called to be dead to sin, live any longer in it? "Whosoever is born of God, overcometh the world, and this is the victory, that overcometh the world, even our faith" in a crucified Jesus. The world, indeed, pleases the distempered affections; and, therefore, the children of this world pursue with eagerness the things that are in it. But the world, and all its inhabitants, will shortly
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expire,

expire, and, therefore, the children of light
 soar above these transient things, that they
 may attain eternal blessings. Besides, the world
 has no charms to tempt those, who love their
 Redeemer, and are studious to attain his glo-
 rious promises. So that here is an end of the
 contest; and Christians become, agreeably to
 the whole tenor of the Gospel, a chosen gene-
 ration, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a
 peculiar people. What glorious titles, and
 privileges are here? Turn, then, your eyes,
 and fix your attention on such things as these.
 Behold with the eye of faith your great Re-
 deemer, who hath purchased, and promised
 to bestow them. Behold him hanging upon
 the cross, that he might break your chains,
 and present you with perfect freedom. That
 so you may join in heart and mind with the
 pious writer,

“Who shall thy wonders then declare,

“Blest tree? or what with thee compare?

“O may aloft thy branches shoot,

“And fill the nations with thy fruit!

“O may all reap from its increase;

“The just more strength, the sinner peace:

“Whilst our half-wither'd hearts and we

“Ingraft ourselves, dear Lord, on thee.”

But lastly, since so many and important are the blessings attendant upon the cross, descend into yourselves, and ask your hearts, whether you are so interested in them, as to glory in it? What, my brethren, are your aims and pursuits? Where do your hopes and wishes centre? Are you content with the form of religion, whilst your wills are unsubdued to the obedience of Christ? How then can you glory in that cross, whereby Christians attain a principle of life, and are renewed in the spirit of their minds? Can *you* glory in the cross, who seldom or never remember his sacrifice at the table of the Lord, and shew by your disobedience, that you desire no participation in the merits of his death? Can *you* glory in the cross of Christ, who never meditate upon him, unaffected with his love, and regardless of what he hath suffered for you? Can *you* glory in the cross, whose affections are chained to the earth, minding nothing but the wealth and the profits of it? Can *you* glory in the cross, who sport away the sunshine of your life, in vanity and pleasure, regardless of the wintry days to come, and that night of dismay, which will overspread sinners for ever? Deal, then, faithfully with yourselves. Such as your dependence at pre-

sent is, such will be your support hereafter; such as are your pursuits, such will be your recompence. Do you value your redemption above all things, so that the abiding sense of it in your hearts becomes the source of holiness and peace?—you will be owned at last by the Redeemer. Do you overlook his sacrifice, and pride yourselves in false virtues, you are yet in your sins, and cannot possibly belong to him.

What then remains, but that you humble yourselves before your God, and acknowledge what daily experience may convince you of, that you are unworthy of his goodness, unable to help yourselves, and without mercy, undone for ever. And let as many of us, as are sensible of this our sad condition, if aliens from his covenant of mercy through Christ, instantly cleave to his merits, follow his example, and wait upon him in all his ordinances, and particularly in that sacrament of his body and blood, in which the benefits of his death are conveyed and sealed to us. And O may all of us gladly bear our Redeemer in our hearts, that we may rejoice before him in love, and join with the Apostle in sincerity, “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross

cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."

" Worthy is the Lamb, that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing: for he hath redeemed us to God by his blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation. Therefore blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him, that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever." Amen.

END OF VOLUME I.

world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.

For the Word is the Light, that was with him, to

give light unto every man that believeth in him, and

he gave light unto every man that believeth in him, and

he gave light unto every man that believeth in him, and

he gave light unto every man that believeth in him, and

he gave light unto every man that believeth in him, and

he gave light unto every man that believeth in him, and

